THE SEA GULL

BY KATHLEEN NORRIS

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THE SEA GULL

Books by Kathleen Norris

My Best Girl
Barberry Bush
Hildegarde
The Black Flemings
Little Ships
Rose of the World
The Callahans and the Murphys
Butterfly
Certain People of Importance
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THE SEA GULL

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

Author of

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To Helen Anne Thompson

From distant and mysterious lands
Like some small stranger queen you came,
And we, your seniors, knelt to claim
Accolade at your baby hands.
Full royally you deigned to grant
Prerogatives and powers new;
The first of an imperious crew,
You scattered titles: "Uncle," "Aunt."
And grateful for these gifts you gave,
I bring you tribute,— prose and rhyme,
Emblems of fealty, proof that I'm
Your Majesty's devoted slave.

THE SEA GULL

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CHAPTER I

THE tide was making fast; the rough, steady tide of a late October afternoon. It was brimming the pools, churning in a lather of impatient water between the rocks, lifting the satiny sea grasses in loose, waving masses of purple and emerald ribbons.

There had been no sun all day, and a hard, high wind was driving in from the veiled Pacific. The air was warm, wet, heavy with salt and rain. Gulls, blown sidewise on the wild airs, peeped and careened above the brimming, roaring, swift-running waves.

A hundred miles south of San Francisco Bay, and more than a hundred north of Santa Barbara, and forgotten for a hundred years, a level cliff jutted out into a very waste of rocks and water, a cliff carpeted with crushed, lifeless yellow grass, and giving, on its seaward side, one or two precarious earth and rock stairways down to the shore. From the cliff a young man in a worn tweed golf suit, with a cap pulled down over thick black hair, could study rough stretches of coast to north and south. The former terminated perhaps a mile away in the peaceful delta of the Amigos Creek, where there were sand, willows, a tottering bridge, and the faded pink roof tiles of the old Mission church. But the latter seemed to have no end: great tumbled masses of rocks succeeded tumbled masses of rocks; here and there a wind-blown tree clung to the cliff, but for the most part all

was bare, and forbidding, and lonely, under the scudding gray sky.

Wave after wave, wave after wave came boiling in from the deep, splintering, shocking itself into fragments, swelling in dark green deeps where myriad tiny sea folk awaited it, dwindling, ebbing again to slide back into the onrush of the next wave.

Kent Ferguson, seeing this particular bit of shore for the first time, felt himself fascinated by it. There was a purity, a wildness about it that seemed as soothing to his spirit as was the warm salt air to his face.

Behind him lay all the simple domestic peace of the Espinosa homestead, one of the humble old relics of a vanished and romantic day. The willows, the eucalyptus trees, the adobe house with its narrow poled balconies and distempered walls, all dated from the time when Spanish sheep ranches were scattered up and down the sunshiny dry stretches of California, and travelling padres, on their sturdy "burros," could make in a long day's journey only the nearest neighbour's hospitable hacienda.

Once the Espinosa family had owned the whole county; now their glory was shrunken to a few hundred acres, a few hundred head of red cattle. The *camino real*, the royal highway of a hundred years ago, was merely state highway to the historic old Mission church of San Esteban now, and motor-tire signs told the drivers of dusty cars from Cincinnati and East Saint Louis that this was the "site of the famous Espinosa rancho. The scene of much hospitality in the days before the discovery of gold. The wedding festivities of Señor Pablo Morones of Castile and Maria Giuseppina Espinosa in 1800 were marked by seven days of dancing, feasting, bullfighting, and rejoicing, and attended by the leading families from the entire state."

In the little village of Solito, five miles away, Kent had seen a small brass sign: "Site of the Old Bull Ring." It was an

artistic little shop now, Ye Crackleware Tea-Potte. Artists and semiprofessional and would-be professional folk had found out Solito and peppered it with unpretentious cottages with green doors and yellow window casings; its piny lanes, above the sea, were filled with ruddy, spectacled women who tramped about in sensible boots, with copies of the *Atlantic* under their arms. Solito had a community theatre, and paintings by local artists were for sale in the Old Surrey Grocery and the Neighbours' Girls' Gift Shop, among the bungalow aprons with sunflowers stitched on them and the bright tin buckets and spades.

Only five miles away, and yet the Espinosa rancho seemed as lonely and as deserted this afternoon, Kent mused, as if it had been a very Rip Van Winkle of farms, asleep here for two generations! The velvet bodices, the fans, the silver-studded saddles, and the curvetting Spanish horses were gone, the wine and laughter, the flirting and scabbing and singing, and only the weather-beaten adobe house remained, under the weather-beaten trees—the old house with one elderly woman in it—and the surrounding cluster of barns and sheds and cabins occupied by a few Mexican half-breeds and their wild-looking, black-haired, brown-skinned wives and children.

Kent had not seen Señora Espinosa, in his somewhat guarded inspection of the place; the servants, across tramped door yards pooled with late rains and churned by the hoofs of cattle, had regarded him in surprise from cabin doorways. Evidently they were unaccustomed to company, at the rancho.

"The old lady must lead a gay life here all alone!" he said half aloud, turning back to glance at the low buildings over which the wind was sweeping yellow willow leaves and the sickles of eucalyptus, to look down once more upon the wild punctual uproar of the waves. Still foaming in, still brimming darkly in the emerald pools, still frothing, bubbling,

dragging itself reluctantly away, all glisten and sea shine and twinkle, to come brimming and rushing and foaming back again. And so it had been surging and retreating when old Padre Serra had travelled painfully along this scattered chain of Missions, this path that had truly been to him the royal highway of the Santa Cruz!

"Hello!" Kent said suddenly and loudly. There was something living—something moving—a girl—down there on the rocky edge of the cruel water.

He was over the lip of the cliff in a second, shouting as he lowered one foot after another on the almost impassable steepness of rocks and stony ridges, catching with his hands at projections, and so devoting his eyes to the needs of the descent that he was close upon the girl before she became aware of his presence at all.

The wind, soft but steady, had evidently carried his voice away; the girl jumped as her eyes caught him, and the face she turned to him was startled and unfriendly.

She had been merely crouching close to the rocks, perhaps studying some sea thing in the pool; he saw now that she was unhurt, self-possessed, indeed, as she stood up and faced him.

A young girl—not quite out of the sweet growing gawkiness and bloom of childhood indeed. She was, perhaps, eighteen or nineteen, he thought, not tall, but with something oddly direct, oddly compelling, in the level steady glance of her blue eyes. Kent instantly felt himself an intruder.

"I beg your pardon!" he called, smiling, above the noise of waves and water. "I saw you from the cliff up there, and it gave me a scare! I thought you might be in trouble."

There was fair hair ringing itself against the rough edge of the little soft untrimmed hat she wore pulled down over her eyes. Through a film of this bright hair she gave him a quizzical swift smile.

"In *trouble?*" she echoed, in a voice whose husky sweetness was discernible even here, in the gusty warm wet wind.

"I didn't know——" Kent answered, smiling.

"Did you——" She had braced her slender body upon two firmly planted feet, he felt it almost impossible to get a steady footing here among the rocks, but she evidently knew them, every one. "Did you want to see the Señora?" she demanded.

"Just wandering about," Kent answered.

The young slim body, with the budding breasts and the square boyishly straight shoulders, was clad in a jersey dress of warm brown that clung to every perfect outline. Her low sturdy shoes were laced over rough little stockings; she wore heavy gauntlets. If a pretty girl were bound upon so wild, so dangerous a walk, upon so wild and unfriendly an afternoon, she could hardly, Kent decided, be better dressed for it, at any rate.

"Are you staying at the Saint Stephen—the hotel at Solito?" the girl asked, with a shade more of encouragement in her manner.

Kent nodded, staggering as he attempted to adjust his feet into safer positions. A seventh wave bubbled and sucked close below them, receded with the screaming and shrieking of pebbles. Gulls swooped and peeped about his head. He felt the noise and motion oddly confusing, he felt almost a faint sensation of vertigo. The gray rocks, the gray ocean eternally tumbling and moving, the dark clouds in a darker sky were all strangely alarming. A fall here would be a fall to death, shallow as these channels were, and prettily set with grasses and colour. There would be small mercy between these rocky points, these walls and lumps and chunks of quarrelsome and restless green water.

"Here!" the girl, who had been studying his half-annoyed and half-smiling face with shrewd eyes, said suddenly. She

extended an imperious and gauntleted hand, and Kent, grasping it, felt absolute solidity, absolute security in the grip of her young fingers. "Come up this way, and I'll surprise you!" she called, in a friendly voice.

Still grasping her hand, he stumbled after her for a dangerous hundred yards. She was moving southward, and slightly toward the shore, rising steadily. Halfway up the cliff's rocky face, she stepped almost out of sight, and Kent, panting after, found himself beside her in a roofed cave of rock only big enough to hold their two bodies.

But in what delicious security and quiet it held them! The floor of the little shelter, upon which the girl in her brown jersey dress sat comfortably cross-legged, and upon which Kent sat as upon a chair, with his legs dangling outside, was roofed with black rock and floored with fine white sand. The noise of the pounding surf, the gulls, came only faintly here, and the wind's rough breath and voice not at all.

The silence, the peace of it, almost dazed Kent. The girl laughed frankly at his pleasure and relief in the sudden contrast.

"Can you believe it?" he said boyishly. "Lord, this is nice, after *that!*"

And a jerk of his head indicated the running levels of green water, and the flying spray and blown gulls below them. He sifted a handful of sand. "The tide gets up here sometimes?" he asked surprisedly.

"Oh, higher than this! We have autumn tides—well, today is a big tide!" the girl answered, smiling. "It's turned —it's coming in. The water will be in here in the cave tonight," she predicted calmly, "just about high water—just about ten o'clock!"

She had taken off her mashed little hat, and Kent thought he had never seen anything prettier than her bright hair, fine shining gold hair that kept a child's free slippery wildness in its loosely gathered masses. It was straight hair, oddly

without an effect of solidity or body, a soft wild golden mop blown lightly about by all the salt winds of the Pacific.

Her skin was fair, too, but her brows were almost black, and so heavy that they enhanced the general impression she gave of a frowning, or at least an intent, child. Her eyes were very blue, and her mouth wide over big firm white teeth. An Englishwoman's mouth, Kent thought, and an Englishwoman's frank big smile. The gold hair looked like the northern races, too, and the blue eyes. But those heavy, straight, serious black brows somehow didn't fit. Altogether, she hadn't quite grown up to her somewhat startling beauty; she would be extraordinary in ten years.

"These cliffs below the rancho are honeycombed with caves," she said. "Down there, now—down the shore a mile or two, there's a real one, with a fireplace and a hammock—I've had it for my playhouse since I can remember anything at all!"

"You're from Solito?" Kent hazarded. Perhaps in all the world there was no young man of thirty-one better fitted to appreciate the good fortune of finding anything as sweet, as fine and surprising, as this little adventure upon a lonely shore. He was conscious of enjoying it in every fibre of his being.

The girl, who had doubled her young body over in an unaffected and quite simple fashion, to tie the lace of her low shoe, straightened herself up, the laces still in her fingers, to regard him with a surprised, with a faintly indignant expression in her eyes.

"I?" she asked proudly. "I'm Juanita Espinosa."

"Oh?" Kent acknowledged it, half smiling and half apologetic, in the moment of silence that followed the announcement. "I didn't know. I didn't know—Señora Espinosa—had any—— What are you? Her niece?"

"Her daughter," the girl supplied. "Anyone in Solito could have told you," she assured him pointedly.

"Oh? And you live here?"

"All my life," she said. "Except"—she qualified it—"that I've been to school—convent school for four years. My mother taught me here, all the grammar grades. And then I went to boarding school in Marysville."

"I see. But why Marysville? Aren't there nearer schools? San Jose—San Francisco?"

"My Espinosa aunts and my grandmother went to Notre Dame, in Marysville," the girl answered staidly. "When my grandmother went there, Marysville was a bigger city than San Francisco, Los Angeles wasn't begun, and Benicia was the capital of the state. And to my mother—and my father's mother—Marysville is still the place where—where girls go to school!" she ended, with a little laugh.

"Your grandmother must remember queer changes," Kent mused.

"My grandmother is dead," the girl said.

"And you liked boarding school?" Kent, half lying on his arm and drawing little patterns in the sand with a broken shell, asked with an upward glance.

She seemed almost visibly to withdraw.

"Very much," she answered primly and briefly.

He rightly interpreted the change of mood. She felt that she had been too expansive, that he had been doing all the questioning. Kent made amends.

"I didn't like boarding school so much," he volunteered easily, "until the last year. But college was a happy time for me. I'm from Princeton—my father was before me. My name is Ferguson—Kent Ferguson. I went in for English, and wrote, in my sophomore year——" He stopped abruptly, and a sudden shadow came over his face. "That was seven years ago," he said, smiling, and following the smile with a scowl.

"And do you write now?" Juanita demanded interestedly, after a pause, in which she had studied somewhat bewilder-

edly his lowered head and serious face. His gaze was upon the little pattern he was drawing in the sand.

"I'm connected—usually—with a newspaper," Kent said, with an effect of brevity, almost of reluctance. "Just now I'm doing a little—different work. And you"—he branched off suddenly, with a smile, as he glanced up—"you are the last of the Espinosas?"

It was a very special smile. It seemed to tell Juanita Espinosa, as she answered it with her own smile, that she was a woman, full of charm, and that he, as a man, recognized it. She felt her heart begin a slow frightened hammering, a fright delicious and new, mixed with joy, with an excitement that ran like wine, hot and thin, in her veins. They began, easily, as if accustomedly, to talk.

The moments seemed to linger exquisitely; every word, every look, had suddenly become magic. Of her body, young, soft, living, sheathed in its gown of brown worsted, she had somehow become aware, her brown young hands, her voice, her eyes, seemed those of a different girl.

Kent, sometimes looking up at her with a sympathetic half smile in his handsome eyes, sometimes watching his own fingers as they etched lines and circles on the firm sand, talked easily. Juanita was not quite so self-possessed, there was a little excitement in her delighted childish laugh, as if this were a great adventure for her.

"And is this your vacation?" she asked seriously.

"This is my vacation."

"They take good care of you over at the hotel? I know Fernandez, the old man who runs the place—his daughter married the man who used to be our coachman—when we had a coachman," said Juanita. "And I think he was born here, on the rancho. Lots of them were," she added negligently.

The casual largeness of it interested Kent.

"American history has lots of romantic phases," he said. "But I don't think any one of them ever touched the Cali-

fornian Spanish settlers for sheer beauty. I suppose that old bull ring in Solito was on your great-great-great-something's place?"

"On my grandfather's!" she answered, flashing. "We have people on the place here who remember the old sheep clippings, when there were three thousand sheep bleating and crowding in the sheds. Old 'Cension, who is Lola's mother, remembered dances that lasted three days and nights, *fiestas;* we used to have the finest horses, and the finest cattle, in all California, here! And while 'Cension lived, we always had the morning song—the hymn, you know, that everyone sang. My aunts would lean out of their windows, all the young girls, visitors, would join in; my grandmother, perhaps, from the storeroom, the maids from the kitchen, the men from the corral—everyone sang the morning hymn at the rancho!"

She had the trace of a lisp, blurred her s's just a little in true Spanish fashion. Kent felt himself fired by the beauty of the old picture, the beauty of the young story-teller.

"Lord, what an atmosphere! How one would love to write a novel about it!"

Juanita looked thoughtful.

"All that," she said a little sadly, "is long ago. It has all been slipping away, little by little. My mother is not Spanish, she is a New England woman. Beauty, for her," the girl added with her faint characteristic frown, "is elm trees, gardens with hollyhocks and lilacs in them, snow, maple-sugar parties. You've seen snow?" she ended a little wistfully.

"You mean you never have?" Kent asked, genuinely surprised.

"Oh, never!" she told him, smiling. "I'm twenty-three—and imagine that I've never seen snow!"

Twenty-three. But he said to himself that she still looked

no more than a child. She was smiling at him expectantly, with a child's air of being poised for flight; with a child's eager innocent friendliness.

"Snow is very lovely," he said simply. And he tried to tell her something of the dark, sharp winter afternoons in a college town, the big lamps blooming golden in early dusk, the first velvet flurry twisting and tumbling against old brick houses, and the soft glow of lighted windows. He told her of children shouting and running, rosy-faced and with flying muffler ends, and of the ermine carpet that silenced the racket of their feet and made the jingling of sleigh bells the only warning where country roads crossed each other.

"To see little trees, all furred and bent with it," he said, "and forests where it slips softly down into the white—white —white—as far as you can see, between the black trunks."

But she shook her head.

"No figs—no apricots—no eucalyptus trees, and the sun going down on the wrong side of the ocean!" she said whimsically. "To be away from the brown hills and the redwoods! If I ever had to leave this place," Juanita said, under her breath, "it would break my heart!"

"But, my dear child," Kent said, after a pause, with a big-brotherly air of amusement, "you don't expect to spend all your life here?"

"Oh, but why not?" asked Juanita, alarmed. "You mean," she went on anxiously, "you think it's too much—for one girl?"

"Too much," Kent answered deliberately, "and too little."

"Too little!" she echoed, astonished. "Why, but what more—what more could anyone have? I have my mother, and we have enough—not as the old Espinosas had it, but plenty," she added, smiling. "We sell calves and pigs and fruit and chickens, something every week, and I have my horse, and my boat, and my walks, and the Mission and the

village so near, and the garden, and books, and my music." Her voice fell. "It *is* too much for one person!" she said, with sorrowful conviction.

"You are that astonishing thing, a contented woman," Kent said, laughing, "and far be it from me to hint that perhaps some day you will want something more.

"The hour may come when you will turn your back on all of it," he added, in a tone so hard that Juanita glanced at him in astonishment. His face was dark; he was looking down. "On the people who love you, on the life that was planned for you, on safety—on home——"

She was hardly more than a child, after all, and sitting cross-legged on the sandy shelf beside him, she bent and turned her face curiously, trying to look into his face.

"Why?" she asked directly. "Why do you speak so funnily? Did *you* do that?"

"It was something like that," Kent answered, looking up with a somewhat shamefaced smile.

"You left your father and mother?" Juanita asked, astonished.

"By request," said Kent.

"By—— They were angry at you?"

"They were angry at me—ashamed of me. I took exactly eleven dollars and forty cents," Kent volunteered, "and came away."

"But you wrote them?" she asked, distressed.

"Never," Kent answered briefly.

"And have they another son to help them?"

"My brother and my sister—yes. They don't," he said briefly, "need me."

Juanita looked at him for a while in silence.

"You are acting as if it were a sort of joke," she said shrewdly, "but I don't think it can have been so funny!"

Kent glanced at her grinning, and his eyes were blinking and bright.

"You're quite right. It was not funny," he conceded, laughing a little bitterly.

"Won't they—forgive you?" the girl asked, after thought.

"I have never given them the pleasure of refusing," said Kent.

"But if you do well on your newspaper," Juanita argued earnestly, "and if you get along, wouldn't they be glad?"

"That," Kent drawled, "places the matter in a new light. Perhaps if I *do* get along and *do* do well, I'll mail my father a little check and ask his forgiveness," he added satirically.

Something reckless, something hard in his manner vaguely disturbed the girl, and she wondered if what he had done was very bad, if, perhaps, he had been in prison.

"You hadn't done anything *awful?*" she submitted timidly.

"I didn't think so. I fell in love with a young lady in a candy store, Hattie Anderson," said Kent, with unexpected frankness, "and wanted to cut my college work short, get a job, and marry her. That was all!"

"Oh." Somehow she felt a little hurt, a little shocked. "And your father didn't like it?"

"I gather he did not. Anyway, he kicked me out. And my mother would not see me."

"Oh. And she—the girl——"

"She explained at great length that she was engaged to a young man in Trenton," Kent said presently.

Juanita, stunned at the thought of such tragedies, sat silent for a full minute.

"You'll meet someone else, some day," she ventured then mildly.

"I have—half a dozen times," Kent responded, in a hard, cheerful voice, getting to his feet. "We are going to get driven out of here by the darkness in about five minutes!" he said.

Juanita gave him her gloved hand again, the footing on

the tide-lashed cliff was bad. They could not speak; the wild roar and riot of it enveloped them. Kent had forgotten the howling hurricane so close to them, the madly bursting seas just below. The wind tore at the girl's clinging gown, at her close hat; Kent jammed his cap tightly, again feeling oddly confused in the noise and violence of these whirling elements.

"Hang—together!" Juanita, as they reached the blown levels of the cliff, shouted in his ear. He saw that she actually swayed to the gale, and she loved it. She had locked her arms tightly in his, she was bent forward to plunge head-on through the storm. Her laughter was caught on the wind like flame, blew by him, and was lost.

The air moved like a steadily moving, cool wall over the fields. In the sober late afternoon, Kent, opening watering and wind-blown eyes, could see no sign of sunset. The troubled sky was leaden, the troubled sea cold gray and lashing white; pepper and eucalyptus leaves showered the low roof of the distant adobe hacienda in a mad whirl of faded yellow and brown.

"You will have to run for it, if this wind holds!" Juanita called. "That's your road, down there where the dust is blowing so. The tide's rising every minute, and long before high tide, in a wind like this, the bar is under water. Look yonder!"

She pointed almost due north, and Kent's look followed her finger.

"See the flat there," the girl said; "between us and the Mission—that's where our road runs! And when the tide's high, we're an island. You can see the water rising there now."

"But here—back of us—toward the south," Kent cried, against the wild airs, "aren't your fields on the mainland, there?"

"Some of them are, but this part, where the house is, is

cut off completely by a channel—an ugly channel, too, cut clean through the hill, and rocky," Juanita shouted back. "It's only twenty feet wide, in most places, but anything that drops in *there*—— Oh, look!"

She interrupted herself in astonishment, and her pointing finger now indicated the ranch buildings, low and flat, under the big, shaggy trees. "Look!" Juanita said. "A motor car! What on earth is that doing at our place?"

Kent glanced in surprise at her startled face.

"Is that so extraordinary?" he asked.

"Well, yes," said the girl, pleasurably excited. "I don't know that I ever knew it to happen before! My mother doesn't have—callers. And as for tourists, we have a sign on the road, 'Private Property.' Nobody ever comes down our road, even if—even if to-day the road weren't almost under water already!"

"But, surely—surely *somebody* comes to call now and then," Kent suggested, at a shout. "Aunts, for example. Everybody has aunts who make calls."

"Well, *I* haven't!" Juanita called, with an accent on the pronoun, and without removing her puzzled eyes from the motor car, as she began almost to run down the road. "Our only relatives are quite terrible people—the Castellagos, of Mexico City, enormously rich, with fourteen children—I've never even seen them!"

She was moving toward the ranch house now, with a sort of free grace in her quickened stride. For a few hundred feet, after they turned their backs to the sea, they could see the old place laid like a panorama before them, and beyond it the wide flat space where the creek came through, and where, Juanita had said, the rising tide sometimes closed the road. Beyond again was the mild line of the old Mission church, built by cowled and barefooted Spanish Franciscans two hundred years before, deserted and empty for two or three generations, and now opened and restored simply because

men had learned to make horseless carriages and these motors were bringing tourists to San Esteban all summer long.

But after it left the cliffs the old dirt road dipped down into a lane hung with dry mallow bushes and willows, and a few straggling oaks, and here again the wind was baffled and a deep country stillness reigned. They might have been two hundred miles from the sea, rather than scarce that many yards.

The soft damp air in the lane was sweet with tarweed and some pungent ocean grass; at one place, gnarled old apple trees hung over it and dry yarrow stalks lifted their russet heads into the lower branches.

And here, in the sudden, almost bewildering peace and quiet, Juanita seemed to realize for the first time how strange had been their little adventure, and when her sidewise glance caught Kent's sidewise glance she reddened and laughed a desperate little laugh.

"I am thinking that—that was funny," she said a little hesitatingly: "our meeting, and our beginning to talk—at once, that way. Nobody ever gets over this far, on to our rocks, and, I suppose—I suppose I felt that that made you—not quite a stranger."

He thought it charmingly said, with the little rushes and pauses, and the bright colour in her cheeks, and the odd childish air of beseeching in her blue eyes.

"I don't know what my mother would say," she added. And in a more definite voice, and with a tinge of defiance in it, she added, "I know *well* what Sister Louise would!"

"Surely," said Kent, "human beings may talk to each other when they meet upon a lonely beach?"

"I thought," Juanita said, half to herself, and he could see that she was ranging her defences against some imaginary arraignment, "I thought you wanted to speak to Mother. I naturally asked you what you wanted. I saw—I saw then, of course—that——"

"That——?" Kent urged her, as she paused.

"That you were the sort of person one speaks to!" Juanita said triumphantly. And more hurriedly, as they emerged from the lane into a portion of level road that obviously led through cow yards and corrals to the ranch house, she added: "Mr. Ferguson, do let me warn you! You're walking, and you positively won't get across that bar until low tide, which is something after midnight, unless you run for it! There's a heavy tide to-night. You'll just make it in daylight, as it is."

"I'll run for my life!" said Kent, looking at her rather than the road.

"And then it's five straight miles into Solito. Will you," Juanita asked with some concern, "mind that?"

"I'll love it," Kent assured her, after a second's hesitation. "Well," he added, smiling, "good-bye."

They stood for a moment smiling a little vaguely, Juanita looking straight up into his face, from under the plain little hat and the flyaway gold hair, and Kent holding the hand she had given him in farewell. The lane was behind them now, they were out under a long line of eucalyptus, brown and weatherbeaten, standing like sentinels between the brown weatherbeaten fields and the colourless fences.

"You turn left there, before you get to the barns," the girl directed him. "There's a path past that field where the corn stalks are—then you go straight toward the bar. I'd—I'd keep moving, if I were you. Good-bye."

Kent wrenched her hand, and again they smiled at each other before he turned away. Juanita stood, for a long time, looking after him, her blue eyes serious, blinking slowly like those of a thoughtful child. Her breath rose and fell upon an occasional deep breath.

"If that water *is* over the bar," she said, half aloud, "he'll have to come back."

And she looked keenly through the shadowless twilight

toward the spot where the sea and the low meadows met. Surf was creaming angrily against the sandy ridges and grassy tufts that usually were above high water. But whether it was water that dimmed the road, or the rapidly falling dusk, Juanita could not tell.

Cows were clanking and jostling in from the hills as she crossed the barnyard; she could see the red light of lanterns within the big barn, and hear the men chanting to the cows the milking song. A good smell of milky breath, sour hay and wet earth mingled with the cool airs of the dark, autumnal afternoon. Antonio's wife was cooking onions and tomatoes; the appetizing odour streamed out into the dusk. Luisa's baby was being put to bed, a sodden warm lump of sleepy protest, in a dark room fitfully lighted by a poor little lamp. Luisa would be carrying the lamp back to the kitchen; it flared red against the bedroom wall and was gone. The kitchen window sent crimson rays into the early, shadowless winter evening.

CHAPTER II

JUANITA crossed a door yard worn bare and hard by the trampling of feet throughout two hundred years of vigorous living, under the rapidly shedding pepper and willow and eucalyptus. She entered a low, shabby gate that gave, Spanish fashion, upon a square court.

The adobe walls of the patio were gray in twilight, peeling and shabby. They were flanked by a narrow earth-floored porch, roofed by old pipe tiles and supported by poles. There were jointed, dry geraniums languishing in jars, a great olla, sweating darkly, hung from a beam, and yellow corn in the ear, and tassels of red peppers, dangled by the kitchen door. A round fountain in the centre had been dry for a hundred years; Juanita saw that Lola had laid great turkey wings upon its chipped brim, to dry for stove brooms.

A glow came from the kitchen door; forms moved briskly through the red fumes within. Lola, Lolita, and Dolores, mother, daughter, and granddaughter, were having their usual brisk battle over the dinner-getting.

"Wouldn't you think you three could get a little chili and soup together without breaking all the Commandments?" Juanita called as she passed, in easy Spanish.

"Oh, heart of the dear Lord, Señorita," the middle-aged woman answered smoothly, in the tongue the girl had used, "it isn't the taste of the dinner, for the Señora eats nothing, and you are like a child that will stuff itself on bread and jam while the meat is coming in, but what of this army of locusts that 'Tonio will have in to-morrow—the cattle men, God send a blight on them!"

The rich, easy voice, in which no trace of real concern or distress lingered, was still in Juanita's ears as she opened one of the low doors and entered the main room of the hacienda, the long, earth-floored apartment that Maria Cutter, a shy, pale-headed girl from a prim New England homestead, had tried to turn into a parlour like her mother's when she had married the last of the Espinosas, thirty years before.

The same Maria, but with her pale hair white and lifeless now, and her thin small face almost as white, was sitting here, when Juanita aflush with youth, and with all the joy and mystery of youth, came in.

It was an odd room, but, like all the rest of her environment, and like all the circumstances in which she found herself, it was simply taken for granted by the daughter of the house with that unquestioning loyalty and satisfaction that is part of youth. The rambling hacienda had disadvantages truly, but it was home. More, it was one of the show places of the Golden State that was so rapidly losing its beautiful old landmarks; the Espinosa homestead, sadly shabby, sadly denuded of the royal acreage that had once surrounded it, was still as authentic, as historic, as the old Missions themselves.

Upon the floor, which was sunken, smooth-worn earth, gaudy rich Indian rugs were piled two-deep. The windows, irregular oblongs cut through eighteen inches of plaster, were curtained in clean dimity, as had been the small-paned windows that looked out upon the elms and snows of Maria Espinosa's childhood. There were Pembroke chairs, and a useless, bulky highboy, combined with the heavy table that had been cut and carved and stained from eucalyptus wood by one of the Mexicans on the place, and with home-made pioneer chairs with seats of laced cowhide. Navajo blankets covered a wide couch, modern books, the philosophy, poetry, essays of a wideawake modern girl, rubbed shoulders on the

bookshelves with old favourites: Trollope, Dickens, Lever in dark green cloth, the Encyclopædia Britannica in twenty rotting volumes; Stanley from darkest Africa and Roberts from forty-one years in India had met at last under this low pipe-tiled roof beside the foggy Western sea.

Old black jars, once filled with Spanish olive oil, brimmed now with cosmos and chrysanthemums and gave life to the room. There had been a big fireplace once, but where the green bay logs had sizzled with creamy sap the smoked plaster was swept clean, and when Juanita and her mother needed warmth, they fired the little fat, iron stove, the "airtight" that made the room tenable in half the time it would have taken a dozen open fires.

Maria Cutter Espinosa, known wherever the Espinosa ranch was known as "the Señora," nearing sixty now, sat in an old-fashioned New England rocker of walnut and rattan. A flat cushion, protected by a lace tidy, was tied to the back of the chair, and each wide arm had its corresponding cushion and tidy.

At her elbow, upon a table filled with the useless accumulations of years, the gift books, trays, picture frames, statues, vases, baskets of the passing generation, a double student lamp burned mildly behind its scholarly green shades. The lamp, the chair, the mantel clock of a plumed bronze cavalier and his plumed bronze charger, under their glass globe, all represented separate and desperate efforts upon the part of the Señora to bring Worcester, Massachusetts, to her young Spanish husband's distant home upon the Pacific Coast.

East had met West with uneasiness, even in this small room, and they were still at outs. Lolita had draped Spanish lace over turkey-red calico upon the mantel under the clock; the lamp stood upon a rough, stiff strip of horsehair cunningly braided into red, brown, gray, and black design; and close beside her mother's chair Juanita had seated herself now,

upon a hideous stool made in the Indian fashion of the skulls and horns of cattle. An Indian basket of brown arrowhead design she transferred from the chair to her lap.

There was darning in the basket, and the Señora's cool, thin, blue-veined fingers were gently, trimly busy with it. She smiled mildly, gently at her daughter, through the strong glasses that fitted so well her high, pale forehead, her looped hair, her slender flat figure in its high-waisted, long-sleeved black alpaca.

"Well, Nita?" she said pleasantly.

"Well, *Mother*——!" said the girl, in a great burst. And sitting at her mother's knee she poured the story out eagerly, the story of the strange man who was so attractive, of the talk on the cliffs, of his final hurried departure to escape from the rancho before the tide should be over the bar. "For there's a terrific tide, Mother. It seems to me that I never saw it so high in October!"

"I thought you were going to walk as far as the Lighthouse, dear?" the woman presently asked. Juanita, her hands idly playing with the stockings, coloured quickly. There was some reserve, some faint suggestion of disapproval, in her mother's voice.

"I was, Mother!" she said eagerly. "But the road—where it goes along under the cliffs—looked so wild, with the sea coming in, and the surf blowing up in the air, that I really didn't want to——"

Her mother was not listening; there was a strained, absent look upon the pale, delicately moulded face.

"Mother," Juanita asked anxiously, "do you think I shouldn't have spoken to him? Was that wrong?"

There was no immediate answer to the question, for Lolita came to the doorway with an apathetic announcement that dinner was ready. But Juanita noticed, all during the simple meal, that her mother seemed preoccupied, seemed strangely uneasy, and that she did not taste her food, merely

drinking the hot thin tea that accompanied all her meals, and when they were again seated in the living room she was relieved rather than surprised to have her mother revert to the topic.

"What you did, Juanita, was natural enough, my dear," the Señora began. Usually, at this hour, her lean, cold hands were busy with an intricate game of Patience, but to-night she sat idle in her high-backed chair, and Juanita, comfortably sunk into an old velvet armchair opposite her, could only conclude bewilderedly that it was the casual introduction of Kent Ferguson's name that had caused her mother this obvious uneasiness and strangeness.

"It isn't your speaking to a strange young man, Juanita," her mother resumed presently; "that, I suppose, is a natural thing to do—meeting him here on your own home property, unexpectedly. But—I fear life for you, dear. It makes me realize how—inexperienced you are!"

Her voice dropped and she was silent. Juanita, brimming with all the joy of life, felt her own heart bound with expectation and hope. Never in her life had the future and the sense of her own personality glowed within her as they did to-night.

"If I should die," said the Señora painfully, "who would be your friends? Where would you go?"

"You won't die, Mother dear," Juanita said confidently, as she had said a thousand times, "and if you die, I'd simply live along here comfortably, selling cattle and fruit——"

The cheerful, half-bantering voice stopped as she smiled encouragement at her mother. But the Señora's slim, spare figure actually writhed, and she put her bloodless hands over her face.

"You know *nothing* of life!" she said, in a whisper.

"I know—don't I?—as much as most girls when they're twenty-three?" Juanita demanded, a shade affronted.

"Nothing! Nothing!" the Señora whispered again. And

then, with a visible effort she added, "Get my cards and table, dear. I shall go mad if I think."

Juanita, concerned, set up the little green table and placed upon it the two worn packs, and the older woman, nervously and quickly, caught the cards in her trembling fingers and began shakily to lay out red and black.

Thus the evening became as all their other evenings. A wood fire crackled in the little stove, the steadily burning student lamps shed a pleasantly tempered light upon all the incongruities of the long, low-ceiled, plaster-walled room. Outside, the wind continued to buffet and whine, and the steady crash and roar of the sea was brought into the room, died away, strengthened again.

They could hear the willows and eucalyptus straining in the garden in the black dark. Before eight o'clock the windows were streaming with a black glisten of rain. It dripped from the leads that ran about the low portico of the patio, and chuckled in the gutters.

The room held a thousand resources for Juanita on such an evening, and bore, for her, none of the daunting aspects of a low country-house sitting room upon a wild, rainy night. To be sure, the girl preferred the summer evenings, scented with roses and tarweed and the first sweet sharp dews upon the dust, when the men and girls sang in the cornfield or on the shore, and the moon floated up, enormous and golden, over haycocks and sprawled oaks.

But winter had its charms, too. It was not bad to feel it closing down upon them, doubling the value of the piano, the French books, the gay, enormous cards with matadors and banderilleros on them, with which Juanita sometimes told fortunes and sometimes played "Reina Isabella," the rows of books she knew so well and yet never exhausted, the hours of idle, yet so pleasant, talk with her mother.

Sometimes Juanita practised on her typewriter; she had taken a business course at the Convent, for no better reason

than that Gertrude Keating, two years older than she, had praised it. Sometimes she wrote a charmingly free and amusing letter to some old chum or to some nun. Sometimes she drew plans of what she would like to do with the old hacienda.

With ruler, soft eraser, large sheets of paper lightly tacked to a board, Juanita spent many a happy, too-short evening.

"To tell you the truth, I'd leave the cabins as they are, Mother. I don't believe there's one of the servants who would appreciate bathrooms and electric light!"

"Well, I don't know but what I would, Juanita," the Señora, playing a red queen thoughtfully, would agree.

"But, Mother—this house!" Juanita would begin, flashing. "The walls—all plastered, every one, and perhaps painted just a sort of dull tomato pink—very faint. Then, great soft lights shining on the ceilings——"

"Not glaring," the older woman might offer peaceably, in the pause.

"Oh, no. Very soft. Then these rooms turned all into living rooms, libraries—I'd have *lots* of books. The bathroom torn out, that old door reopened into the garden, plenty of new baths upstairs, rugs, hospitality again——"

"It would cost hundreds," the Señora said once, shaking her head.

"My dear Mother, it would cost thousands!" answered Juanita gaily. "But in the end, it would make this rambling old tile-roofed place the most fascinating home in all California! With the sea, the big trees, the creek, the Mission, all our fruit—what king could have more!"

To-night, however, Juanita did not have recourse to architecture. She sang, as usual, three or four songs at the piano, went out into the kitchen to inspect the puppies, returned with a story of Lolita's hygienic standard that made the Señora shudder violently, and finally relapsed, in a big chair, to read and to dream.

Once, the dream getting very much the better of the book, she unexpectedly jumped to her feet. There was a big mirror, primly framed in black, with New England blossoms painted upon the frame, hung between the old engravings and samplers on the distempered walls. Juanita gave herself a sudden shamed inspection in it.

Her flushed face, with its self-conscious half-lowering of the curled eyelashes, smiled back at her. The fair, shining hair was loosened carelessly, the cheeks and the blue eyes were lighted by a new glow, there was a liquid brightness in the blue eyes. The linen collar fell back to show a white column of slim throat, and the red dim lights of the room glimpsed behind her framed the whole head in a halo of gold.

"What is it, Juanita?" her mother asked anxiously. The Señora was still uneasy, jumped and glanced about nervously at every tiny unexpected sound to-night.

"Nothing!" The girl resolutely resumed her chair, reopened her book; she *would* read, if only a few pages, she resolved.

But the thrilling story of Juanita Espinosa came between her consciousness and the flowery periods of "The Idylls of the King," a smile dimpled the corner of her mouth, her beautiful eyes were half lidded again as she set sail upon the sea of enchanted dreams.

There had been something unusual about that young man. Tall, and handsome, too, under his smooth crest of black hair. Her deliberate invocation of his memory brought the sun-browned, clean-jawed face and the quizzical smile suddenly before her, and her breath stopped for a second.

Juanita had known "boys" before this. During her last school year there had been dances, and then there had been Cecilia Leonard's brother Bernard, a really nice boy, who had come all the way from Buffalo to take Cecilia home, and with whom, and Cecilia, and their aunt, Mrs. Conway, Juanita had had two wonderful weeks of travel, last July.

They had motored to Tahoe, and the Blue Lakes, and Yosemite, and Santa Barbara, and San Diego, and—with the exception possibly of that last evening, when he had been "silly"—Bernard had made a delightful impression upon Juanita.

But Kent Ferguson—ah, that was different! Never had a conversation, in her whole life, had the curiously trembling, yet strangely simple and easy, quality as had had those sentences exchanged across the sandy floor of the little refuge in the cliff.

She had been a solitary child, for all her little-girl days on the old rancho, but that did not mean that she had run wild there. Maria Cutter's daughter had learned from her mother to write and read and cipher neatly, to recite "Barbara Frietchie" and "The Clown's Baby," to curtsey, to practise her scales, to brush her teeth and hair, to pray, to sew, to bake, to dust, to thrill over Gettysburg and Bunker Hill.

And with these elements and interests had gone others, about some of which only her mother was aware. Spanish the child had learned before English, and to ride a broncho before she could walk well. The baking of tortillas, the habits of rattlesnakes, tarantulas, of the slimy black octopuses that infested the rocks, of the heavy-quartered bobcats that mated and fought in the chaparral, were all commonplaces to Juanita. She knew how to brew red wine of the sour grapes that grew beyond the orchard, how to plait thongs into lariats, how chickens and lambs were made eatable, how corn was hammered in a stone mortar for tamales, and linen hammered on the rocks beside the Solito Creek to make it clean.

In the fights between Lola and Lolita, Juanita sometimes played a spirited part, and the "trouble" into which the third Dolores had recently gotten herself had been handled

by the girl single-handed. The Señora, she had imperially decreed, was not to be bothered by anything so thoroughly disgusting as Dolores's conduct. Juanita had walked with the weeping Dolores over to San Esteban, and they had talked to the old priest, and the old priest had talked in turn to sullen, dark-browed Joe Bettancourt. And now the complacent Dolores was Joe's proud wife at sixteen, and had a fat dark-eyed baby whom Joe sheepishly adored.

But this had all come recently, after Juanita's boarding-school years. An eager, slim girl, with flyaway gold hair and strange black-fringed blue eyes, she had walked in a row of uniformed girls for four successive terms, she had slept in a dormitory cubicle, eaten her meals at a long, bare table. She had contentedly chattered the school jargon, of "penances," and "sweet-press," and "intentions"; she had blindly adored one impassive, gentle nun and survived a score of chums, factions, fights, tears, convulsed explanations, reconciliations, nights of whispered and giggling mutinies, pantry raids, and imposing entertainments for "Mother General's jubilee."

All this had seemed normal enough, filled with passing fears, with very real contentments and occasional excitements, with a sense of pleasure in one's own popularity, a sense of jealousy of some girl's wrist watch, a sense of dull pain when dear Sister Victoria was transferred to the Saint Louis house.

But there had been nothing as thrilling in all this placid progression from thirteen to twenty-three such as had been supplied by the events of this single afternoon. The word "woman" came to Juanita as she half lay, half sat here in the quiet room, lulled by the sound of the wind and the sea, and it seemed new to her.

She thought, "Girls marry. *Marriage.* To—to trust one's self to—a man. Strange—strange. Kitty Norman's sister married—Josie Norman. I remember all the upper-

class girls gathering around her when she came back, and how they laughed."

Odd cadences in his voice, when Kent Ferguson, looking up for a second from his marking of the sand, had told her of himself! Cadences that made a girl's heart rise suddenly, and press against her breath. "You don't expect to spend all your life here?" he had said.

Had she thought so? Had she ever thought anything about it at all? Juanita began to think the answer to the last question must be a decided no.

At the Solito Hotel, what was Kent Ferguson thinking now? The telephone in the hall would bring that voice back to her in a few brief minutes, did she but dare use it. The knowledge made her hands go cold suddenly, and her heart beat fast. Would he come to the rancho to-morrow, big and loosely built, in shabby tweeds, with that smile in his half-closed eyes, and would they talk again?

She must think of something else—read a few pages. Her heart was beating so loudly that it seemed incredible that her expression did not betray her.

"Mother!" she said suddenly.

The Señora, listless over the cards that usually held her in close and conscientious scrutiny, started nervously at the abrupt interruption. "Mother, how soon did you fall in love with my father?" Juanita demanded.

The pale quiet face flushed and the Señora smiled. They had been over this ground many times.

"Well, not immediately, although it was immediate with *him*," she admitted. "A cousin of mine—Lowell Clay, had some business connection with Roberto Espinosa—I only knew him as a Western man with wool interests. He was almost fifty then, and I past thirty—I was English Instructor in a girls' school."

"And weren't they all surprised when you announced your engagement?" Juanita, who had had the meagre outlines

of the little story a hundred times before, asked with inexhaustible relish.

"I suppose they were. I don't remember," said the Señora.

"But, Mother, when did you *know* that you loved him?" the girl pursued animatedly.

"Why, I don't know that I ever felt that before we were married," the older woman answered thoughtfully. "Although I always respected him, and he was always kind——"

Her eyes watered; she fell silent. Juanita, watching her curiously, with her head on one side, like a bird's, tried in vain to imagine her mother young, thrilled, beloved, yielding to a man's devotion. Even now, the Señora, quiet, reserved, unemotional, was something of a mystery to her daughter. Juanita's tears, tantrums, thrills, her eagerness and her imagination had little kinship with this calm, repressed personality. The husband of whom she spoke so dispassionately had died when Juanita was but three years old, the girl recollected him not at all. Sometimes she felt that there was some secret, something unexplained, about her father, but this was but a suspicion, after all, and stronger than any mere suspicion was Juanita's conviction that her mother, of all persons, was the last one to help her unravel it.

But in connection with the thought of her mother's strange silences and secrets, another thought came to her suddenly, a thought that had been relegated to the background of her recollection for several hours, by more exciting matters, and she asked abruptly:

"Mother, who came to see you to-day? Whose car was that in the yard—a little gray car—by the willow?"

The Señora's face, already pale, turned ghastly. She fixed a lifeless steady gray eye upon Juanita, giving the girl an odd, almost frightened sense of being held, being constrained by the other woman's eyes. It was as if the Señora

defied her to think her own thoughts, or to escape to the freedom of thought at all, with that steel-gray gaze fixed upon her.

"What car was *what?*" she asked slowly.

"It seemed to be a closed car—a small car, Mother. It was under the willow, and I couldn't see very well from the cliff."

"The man who came about the cattle, perhaps?" suggested the Señora, the muscles about her mouth barely stirring as she spoke, and the tense position of her body and the unwavering steadiness of her glance not moving.

"But wouldn't he have been round by the barns?"

"I don't know," said the Señora slowly, measuredly.

She continued to look at Juanita challengingly, expectantly, but Juanita had already lost interest in the subject. With a delicious sense of returning to thoughts infinitely more absorbing, the girl relapsed into her chair, locked her hands, sank again into exquisite reverie.

She loved her mother, the woman who in her sad and gentle way had always been kindness and goodness itself to her. But Juanita had not reached her early twenties without appreciating her mother's limitations, without the knowledge that her mother had succumbed to the sorrow of widowhood where another woman might have risen up the stronger for it, that her mother's timidities, anxieties, inhibitions were things to be lovingly pitied and soothed rather than shared.

Already hers was proved the master mind a dozen times a day, already she had learned to laugh encouragingly at the fears and warnings that were showered upon her.

"Don't think I don't love you for worrying about me, dearest," she sometimes said. And sometimes her mother answered, with a brief pale smile upon her little New England face: "And I love you for *not* worrying, dear! Never worry, Nita. Life—life is too short, and things—things happen too strangely."

Presently the musing girl, with her book held in her indifferent hand, noted that the Patience game was in progress again, if fitfully and absently. Outside the wind sang and whined, sometimes dying away to such a whisper that they could hear the tonnely chuckle of wet haywood, spattering in the stove, sometimes returning with a wild howl and uproar, rattling shutters and causing wild sweeping and cracking among the garden trees.

The room was warm, the clock guarded by the plumed lizzie cavalier ticked steadily, the aerial branches sweeped high above the old adobe roof, and in any comparative silence they could hear the steady gathering lull and crash of the sea.

Jeanette dreamed the hour on the beach over again, smiled, curled herself up in a ball in the wide armchair, and let her book slide to the floor. Life, with big, smiling Kent Ferguson in it, in his tweeds, and with his quick half smile, seemed incredibly good.

Suddenly, without a sound to warn her, a sensation of terror so hideously acute seized upon her that she sat motionless, frozen even to her eyeballs with fear.

It was as if—it was as if, she told her sick heart—someone was watching her.

Jeanette did not move, although the palms of her hands became wet and her mouth grew dairy. Her brain raced.

Someone—someone—was not there in the smouldering dark wild night, looking in upon her mother and herself. But who, and why? The old rancho was no hair for burglars, no door had been locked there for two hundred years.

No use to cry out, to create a wild scene. The Spanish and Mexican servants had long ago withdrawn to their own cabins. There were but two women here alone to-night, and one of them was delicate and not young, and one of them hardly more than a child.

Jeanette sat on, holding herself motionless, not daring to

three thousand evenings in this quiet room, affrighted by no such improbable phenomenon.

A man, wandering about in the dark, staring in here? But the hospitality of the rancho was famous, even though there was no social life here nowadays. The very tramps knew that they could find food and shelter, and even music and good company at the cabins there, and that the boldest robber in the world could find no more! A gipsy woman, perhaps, caught by the flood tide on the bar? But what woman would not have found Lola's kitchen, in its heartening warmth and odorousness, hours ago? What woman would have wandered about in the wind and rain from darkness until nine o'clock?

The procedure, with her mother and herself, was exactly the same, night after night. While Juanita, chattering or silent, sleepy or wide awake, fussed about the room, her mother sat trim and erect and placid in her big chair. When the girl had finished, she extinguished all the lamps except the fat little china lamp with the pink shade and bowl, which was carried to the bedrooms. Then the Señora put her frail little arm in the crook of her daughter's warm, firm young arm, partly to steady her, partly to lean upon her, and together they went slowly across the entrance hallway and into Juanita's bedroom. The hacienda boasted an upper story, where there were many rooms, wooden-floored, plaster-walled, with deep-cut windows and doors alternating in a row upon the narrow balcony, but these had never been used in Juanita's lifetime. There was space and to spare in the rambling lower floor. The Señora's room was next to her daughter's. Beyond this was the large bare bathroom they shared, a bathroom obviously an afterthought, for which a whole bedroom had been sacrificed.

To-night, with the pink lamp in her hands and the light familiar touch of her mother's fingers upon her arm, the girl, leaving the darkened parlour, chanced to find again, in

the wall mirror, the reflection of her own face, as she had found it an hour ago.

Behind it, in the mirror, the window's dark panes were captured, and in them, now, there was truly more than the running, liquid blackness. Juanita felt her heart plunge, consciously steadied herself upon her feet, consciously tightened her bent arm, to press her mother's fingers a little closer. She made no sound.

A man's face, watching intently, was framed in one of the small panes as a picture might have been.

His face was close to the glass; he had not caught her look, in the mirror, and the expression of steady scrutiny in his narrowed eyes did not change, nor did he withdraw.

Juanita, chilled with an icy fear, praying as she had never prayed in all her sheltered days before, guided her mother carefully, gently, across the cool passage that smelled of rain and plaster to-night, through her own room, and into the Señora's rather bleak one.

Her mother's unconsciousness saved her. It was possible to speak, partially to undress, to brush her hair, chatter about leaving the door between their rooms open, even to lie down, in the horrible dark, with her warm wrapper on, and her wide-awake head so lightly touching the pillow that at the slightest alarm she might be upon her feet, ready for anything.

Her mother had a pearl-handled brace of small pistols hidden here somewhere, but not only was the girl herself rather afraid of firearms, but she knew that any allusion to them, any question as to their hiding place, would frighten the gentle little Señora out of her senses.

So she lay with open eyes, staring into the wheels and stars of utter blackness, listening to the buffeting of the winds, the roar of the sea, the creaking of the trees, with her heart weak with fear and her mouth dry, and her hands icy.

A man's face, watching gravely, steadily, purposefully. But that was not all. Juanita had recognized this face. The man at the black window panes, the man who had for some bad purpose hidden himself out there in the wet, dark patio, was Kent Ferguson.

CHAPTER III

THE clock struck ten, eleven, twelve. "I am lying awake all night!" Juanita thought, with a childish sense of awe. Yet, despite her terror, despite all the wild confusion of the black night and of her confused thoughts, sleep found her.

Perhaps he had gone away again into the dark. Perhaps he was sleeping in the hay barn, or in one of a dozen sheds where were stored drying sheep pelts, old horse blankets, wool heaped just as it was clipped from the fat sheep.

At all events, the hours were striking—striking, and he made no move. If his motive was robbery, he perhaps had rifled the old sideboard, snatched Juanita's silver baby mug, and gone his way.

But she knew in her heart that he was not a robber. There had been none of the wild furtive peering of a sneak thief in that quietly scrutinizing glance.

Nor had there been—with her new knowledge she knew this, too—the mere gallant curiosity of an idle man attracted to an unknown girl in that look. His was the type that would have boldly knocked, have boldly presented itself to her mother, have carried off the situation of an unexpected call. He had not been a mere mischievous spy upon the home and the family of the girl with whom he had talked on the beach. No man in his senses could be that, at such an hour and upon such a night, cut away from his hotel on the mainland by a high-running tide and by almost six rain-drenched miles of unknown road.

Trapped there by the storm? Not Kent Ferguson! Little

as she knew of men, she knew of him that he would have rejoiced openly in so romantic a situation. How debonairly he would have explained his predicament to her mother, accepted a dinner and a bed, sat entertaining the two lonely women, upon the dark, stormy night!

One o'clock striking. Juanita, lying lightly on top of her bed in her wrapper, alert to spring, a box of matches in her hand, suddenly drew the heavy warm rug up over her, suddenly curled herself sidewise, was almost instantly asleep. Her Spanish father wooing his cool little bride. "The Idylls of the King," the gray closed car under the willows, the steady, half-veiled look of the strange man on the shore all blended, swam together. She was gone.

But not into her usual deep little-girl oblivion. The noise and clamour of the night roused her more than once, and she awakened in terror, raised on her elbow, shaking, panting, staring into the dark. Once she thought Lola and Lolita were talking, a steady, audible, far-off murmur, and went like a flying gull in the blackness to her mother's door.

"Mother! Are you awake?"

A second's silence. Then mildly:

"What is it, dear?"

"Did you hear—voices, Mother?"

"No, dear. But it's a night to hear noises."

Relieved, Juanita crept back into bed. And this time, as four o'clock struck, to deeper, to exhausted slumber.

But in the cool gray windy dawn she was again suddenly, alarmedly, awake. Where was she? Back at school, with the inevitable milkman cranking his inevitable car just under the dormitory windows?

No, these stained plaster walls, these deep-cut windows where the morning pressed its dull gray against the shadowy room, were home. Home! But what motor car's engine was already breaking the peace of the rancho?

Juanita, bewildered, but not frightened now, with the

heartening return of even so dark an autumn day, put her feet to the floor, gathered her wrapper about her. She sat for a moment, her cloud of pale gold hair drifting about the faint questioning frown of her face. Her own little school clock, clicking in its alligator-skin case, said half-past five. Half-past five, and a car's engine roaring already?

Certainly it was not the cattle men. These casual Latins would drift in at eleven o'clock, eat largely of chili con carne and frijoles, pick teeth, loiter about the rancho, blink black eyes in fat copper faces at the stock, somewhere about milking time this afternoon.

Juanita went cautiously to the one window that gave on the front of the hacienda. Dim dawn was streaking the faded autumn garden; under an unfriendly mottled sky of gray and black the pampas grasses, the bearded moss roses, the dangling discoloured leaves of the trees looked forlorn. Great diamonded wheels of spider webs had been sketched upon the black-green of the square-cut cypress hedge. There was shelter here, close to the ground, but the upper branches of the tall trees were moving uneasily; poplars bowed, scattering rain again across the rain-pooled, soaking paths, willows dripped dully when the air stirred them.

And where it had stood yesterday, she saw a closed gray car, spattered with mud, standing once again.

A look of utter bewilderment, of frowning astonishment, darkened her face. Impulsively she crossed the plaster-scented, cool passageway, traversed dining room and parlour quickly, and looked into the kitchen.

"Lola———" she began imperiously. But Lola was not there. The old range, the black iron sink, the adventitious piping, and the wide old plaster sills where potted flowers, sewing, medicine, holy pictures, onions, a clock, cook books, and a young baby's paraphernalia all disputed for place, were wrapped in shadows and quiet. The earthen floor was as trimly swept as old Lola had ever swept it; the horrible

limp colourless garment that she sometimes imposed upon her other mysterious apparel as an apron was lying on a chair.

Day had touched the windows with pearl. The black cat, one of a troop of nondescript cats, came out of the pantry, and arched a hard tail against Juanita's bare leg, purring loudly.

For an instant the girl hesitated, nonplussed. Then she swiftly mounted a narrow inner stairway and found herself in the bare rooms and passages of the upper floor. She opened a doorway upon the little narrow balcony that was supported like a shelf on bare poles.

Here, hidden herself by the thick drapery of a shabby old gnarled pepper tree, she was just above the garden, she was not thirty feet away from the gray car.

The cold morning air enveloped her in its fresh chill, but Juanita's trembling was not of cold.

There were two women standing in the garden, murmuring. One was a stranger, wrapped warmly, veiled, indistinguishable both because of the dull light and because of her disguising clothes. The other was the Señora.

To see her mother out of bed at all at such an hour was sufficiently astonishing to Juanita. The older woman usually had her breakfast, and not infrequently her luncheon, in bed. She had had years of bad health; she was always a bad sleeper.

But to see her mother here, before sunrise, in no more formal clothing than her thick padded Japanese robe and slippers, and to see her thus confidentially close to this stranger, who had obviously spent the night hidden away somewhere in the hacienda, was to experience the most amazed moment of Juanita's whole life.

The engine had been stopped; there was an unearthly peace upon the garden. The Señora was talking, quickly, with an agitated hold of the other woman's arm. The stranger spoke only once, and then clearly, decidedly.

"Oh, never—never. That's quite out of the question!" she said.

The voice rang in the cool, wet morning silence, rather because of some poignant feeling behind the words than because she spoke loudly.

"Oh, never—*never*. That's *quite* out of the question!"

The words hung in the air, meaningless words, yet they made the heart of a listening girl thump painfully. Juanita shrank back; if they did not want to see her, they should not see her.

And almost immediately the scene ended, melted as if into a dream. The stranger got into the closed car, started the engine again, leaned over to embrace the Señora—and was gone.

As if it had never been, the car vanished, sweeping smoothly toward the bar that the tides would have opened hours ago, disappearing between the shabby trees and the gaunt stalks of corn and the rabble of collapsing sheds and fences and barns.

And when Juanita brought her gaze back from following it, her mother had disappeared, too; slipped back quietly into the house, and perhaps into her bed again.

But the adventure did not end here. The even tuck-tuck-tucking of a motor bicycle brought her about sharply upon the balcony, when she had turned to reënter the house, and Juanita saw a glitter of wheels flying smoothly in the wake of the motor car. Was the rider a big, loosely knit man in tweeds? If she had never seen Kent Ferguson, would this mysterious wheelman have seemed such a figure? She did not know.

She bit her lip, and the heavy black brows were drawn close together as she went slowly in, out of the fresh wet air that was lifting and brightening every instant. The storm was not quite over, but there would be sunshine to-day. The upper rooms were dank, deserted, in disorder.

One held rotting old leather trunks with broken straps. In another, weather-streaked old wood engravings, webbed thick by spiders, were faced against a stained wall. Seeds dried in what had once been a guest bedroom, the light here came eerily through closed green shutters; there was a sweet dull smell of rotting apples.

Juanita, noiselessly threading the dismal, empty place, opened a last door, jumped, stood still, shaking with senseless fright.

She had expected to find it; there was nothing really terrifying about it. This was where the woman had slept.

There was a tumble of blankets, pillows, on the long-unused bed. There was a glass kerosene lamp upon a thong-seated chair. And on the bureau's dark marble there was a circle of spilled pink face powder.

No other traces of her occupancy remained. Juanita, still trembling, bent her face to the powder, caught a whiff of mondaine perfume utterly unfamiliar, and stared at the reflection of her own golden beauty in the dim mirror.

Back in her own room again she lay down on the cold bed. She had dared to peep in upon her mother; the Señora was asleep, or pretended to be. Dawn was steadily, steadily brightening; there was not a sound on the rancho.

Juanita heard the cocks again, heard cheerful cursing and shouting as the men began to water stock, pitch down hay, get at their milking.

Lola's heavy tread and grumbling commentary—delicious as music this morning!—sounded dimly in the kitchen; young Dolores's sleepy replies. Dolores would be nursing her baby as Luisa indifferently began her sorting and tossing of the day's washing. Luisa had her baby there, too, perhaps. There were always babies in the kitchen.

Wood would crackle in the stove, coffee scent the air. Lola would make sour, delicious rolls for breakfast—some to be burned, some to be thrown out, as the extra butter was

thrown out. Some casual child would bring in a few warm eggs, with the soft feathers still lightly clinging to them, for the Señora's breakfast.

Somebody else would skim cream by the simple expedient of loosening the heavy, leathery sheet of it with a stick, and pushing the crumpled thick folds of it into a pitcher, for Juanita's oatmeal.

Pale sunlight struck in a triangle upon her floor; the shaky beams came through wet leaves, paled, deepened, paled again. Her clock announced eight, it was morning at last! An uncertain morning, with clouds racing across a high, pale sky, chrysanthemums, heavily beaded with water, and collapsed upon the paths, sheets of blue water everywhere ruffled by low gusts. Every doorway leaked a cool wet current of air, but the sea was clear and sparkling, only chuckling and playing with rocks this morning, and by nine o'clock chickens were clucking contentedly upon the great heap of stable rakings that sent an undisturbed pillar of steam straight into the warming day.

Juanita, pale and distracted, her puzzled thoughts crossing and recrossing each other, moved restlessly from one usual morning task to another. Her mother was never disturbed until noon. All questions must wait. The girl's bed was made, but she tossed aside her French. Lessons were somehow stale, useless, to-day. She filled a bowl with flowers, straightened music, finally mounted her horse, and rode, with some hesitation and more than one irresolute pause, toward Solito.

The little town twinkled and shone after the storm. All the long six miles, Juanita had noted the ravages of the beach: driftwood and the Zulu-headed weeds with the long fringed tails were tossed together at high-water mark, in long dark lines, and on the bar dirty foam was collapsing, a bubble at a time, caught in behind logs and flotsam wedged tightly where the tides had no business to disturb them.

But the town looked all the brighter for its rough washing:

women in bungalow aprons were sweeping matted dead leaves from paths and porches, babies in rompers staggered about with tow heads glinting in the sunlight.

Women stopped her, talked to her. Juanita was quite unconscious of what she said or did. Kent Ferguson might be in this town—might conceivably be loitering about at eleven o'clock. . . .

"You look pale as a sheet this morning, Nita," said Miss Elizabeth Rogers, sweet, intelligent, thirty-five, and one of the "Neighbours' Girls" of the Gift Shop. "Storm keep you awake?"

"No," Juanita answered lifelessly, with a ghost of a smile. She was thinking that, if she met Kent Ferguson, she would be very grave. She would presently say mildly: "Will you tell me why you gave me that terrible fright last night? My mother isn't strong, you know; it might have killed her. If the high tide kept you at the rancho, couldn't you have told us? Wouldn't that have been better than frightening us so?"

It was incredible that he might be here, in the village, within a few hundred feet, and yet she not see him. The little gabled Hotel Saint Stephen was just across the street from the post office, any man loitering there on the porch might have seen a buckskin horse with a brownish tail and mane darker than his creamy body, and a girl in old corduroy riding breeches, with flyaway gold hair.

But apparently nobody did. Juanita felt a certain contempt for herself, as she delayed her errands and prolonged her stay, yet there was an odd need upon her, an odd hunger in her heart. Casually, for only a word, a glance, she must see Kent Ferguson again.

She had nothing special to say. She did not even feel the matter important. But nothing else seemed of interest except that somehow, in the sweet fresh morning sunlight after the storm, they should meet and have a few moments' talk together.

Just before noon, she rode home slowly, inexplicably chastened in spirit. It was hard to believe that the Kent Fergusen episode was over—nothing was going to happen. A fleeting hope that he might be waiting for her at the rancho led to nothing; no one was there. Luisa and Dolores quarrelled spiritedly as they hung out clothes, chickens picked their way between muddy pools, a trembling little calf, born untimely, bawled regularly for his mother.

The Señora, looking ill, and expressing a decision to remain in bed for a day or two, was languidly busy with a breakfast tray. Juanita, listening for a man's step in the patio, devoted herself to her mother. The quiet hours of the quiet winter day wheeled over the rancho.

"Mother, aren't you going to tell me"— the girl implored her, upon an impulse—"*aren't* you going to tell me who that woman was who slept here last night and left so early? I saw her this morning, from the balcony. Mayn't I know?"

The Señora, a little paler than before, looked at Juanita thoughtfully.

"Yes, you may know, dear," she said slowly—"some day."

"Some day!" Juanita echoed, disappointed.

The other woman made no answer; she lay quietly staring into space, with her brows contracted.

"You have a right to know, Juanita," said the Señora after a while, "but if I have a friend who is in trouble, and that friend makes a confidante of me, what can I do?"

"But you could trust *me*, Mother!" Juanita said.

"I could trust *you*, yes," the Señora conceded; "but I asked her if I might not take you into—our confidence. And she said 'No.' If we lived in a big city, I could have met this—friend, anywhere, in a tea room, in a shop," the Señora reminded her. "As it was, it had to be here, and I had to risk your discovering it."

"In other words," Juanita summarized it, with a child's touch of sulky protest, "it's none of my business!"

The Señora was silent. Nor was the topic mentioned again between them.

In the late afternoon, Juanita went through the lane, across the cliffs, and down to the rocks where she and Kent Ferguson had met. The storm was over, the peaceful sunlight was dying away across a peaceful sea. But summer and autumn had died yesterday, it was clear bare winter now. The air was pure, heavy, still; the fields looked beaten. Leaves that had been blowing gallantly yesterday, when the winds began, lay packed and soaking underfoot now.

Juanita could see from the cliff that the Mission creek was running high and brown, like coffee with milk in it, but the waves that broke at her feet showed clean emerald again, and the gulls were walking in their thousands in the red sunlight, preening and pluming themselves on the crushed wet yellow grass on the cliff.

She mounted the rocky face of the bluff and sat again in the little shelter, with her legs dangling, as Kent's had done, above the tide. And some of the magic came back, but not all. Empty sea, empty sky, and all the world seemed empty, too.

That night, in the dreary hour before dinner, always the hard hour in a country house where illness is, she telephoned to Kent, at the Hotel Saint Stephen, in Solito.

Her mother's room was dusky, close. The sitting room was draughty and cool; all the life of the hacienda seemed concentrated in the warm red lights and moving shadows of Lola's kitchen. The passage where the telephone was placed was dark in dusk and gloom. Juanita, listening, bent close over the instrument in the dark, caught the familiar odour of damp plaster, of mice, of wet woollens.

"Señor Fernandez," she presently said hastily, in a nervous undertone. The proprietor of the Hotel Saint Stephen had been born on the Espinosa rancho seventy years ago; she knew him well. "Señor Fernandez, it's the Señorita.

There's a young man staying at the Saint Stephen—a tall man with smooth black hair, named Ferguson. Would you say I'd like to speak to him?"

"But, no, Señorita," said the polite old voice deferentially. "Not now. The hotel is closed for the season."

A blankness fell upon Juanita. She struggled through a mist of disappointment.

"But—one moment. The hotel wasn't closed—yesterday?"

"Closed ten days ago, Señorita—on the feast of San Francisco."

She thanked him dazedly, sat on blankly in the close, dusky hall that smelled of mice and damp plaster and wet woollens, and into which all the dreariness of the dreary autumn twilight seemed to have concentrated itself.

"Nita!" It was her mother's feeble voice, from beyond a shut door. "The telephone, dear!"

"Yes, Mother. I answered it. It was nothing!" Juanita called back.

Then there was utter silence, while darkness deepened—deepened in the passage, and over the bare world outside, and in Juanita's heart.

After a few days of it, Juanita came to realize that something quite definite had happened to her.

To meet a strange young man on the rocks, to talk to him, to know that he had been imprisoned on the rancho all night and had escaped in the early dawn without the formality of a good-bye—that was nothing. Even his watching face at the window and the odd mysterious episode involving the veiled woman were nothing, or very little, to Juanita's unsuspicious youth. Trapped by the tide, he had, perhaps, wandered about until it was too late decently to present himself at the hacienda; as for the woman, she had some secret reason for interviewing the Señora—it was no concern of Juanita's.

But that Kent had said what was not true, had pretended to like her, to be won to warm and sudden friendship as Juanita had been, and had then proved himself indifferent and untrustworthy—that was hard.

Juanita wanted to talk to him again. Every thought she had now framed itself into words for him. Lovely in her riding breeches, or in the shabby faded old Chinese shawl she wrapped about herself on a chilly evening, she scowled at herself in the mirror. Slim figure, black-fringed blue eyes, flyaway gold hair—for nobody to see!

She could not laugh it off, shake it off, pray it off. Something had happened. Life, the dear familiar life of the dear familiar place, had grown suddenly and unbearably dull. Sometimes she hated Kent Ferguson, sometimes she thrilled to a feeling for him that was anything but hate. But for days she thought of nothing, of nobody else.

And then a second shadow fell upon these dreaming days of early winter. The Señora did not throw off her cold, did not follow her usual custom of coming, white and weak, to a third day's—a fourth day's—luncheon table, convalescent.

She lay in bed, wheezing at first, then quiet. Juanita read to her, in afternoons so still, between her dreamy, lonely luncheon and the early darkness, that the coo of a pigeon outside the Señora's window made them both start.

The clock would tick solemnly through the girl's steady voice. The invalid would lie silent, like a woman of wax, under her gay Indian blanket. Her parrot walked upside down in his cage, chuckled, filmed a beady eye and cleared it again. The basket designed in black and brown arrowheads was untouched, the small religious library, the orderly bare bureau, were never disarranged.

"Mother, hadn't you better see a doctor?" Juanita pleaded, once or twice. But her mother only smiled and shook her head.

"I know my chest colds!" wheezed the Señora.

However, on about the tenth day, Juanita rode over in shining cool sunlight to Solito and talked on her own responsibility to the doctor. And rather to her daughterly triumph, the doctor seemed to agree with her that the Señora's cold was no such slight affair, after all.

That same day turned the whole world black and strange. Calling the doctor seemed to precipitate the blow. From not needing him because her ailment was so slight, the Señora had come, in a few short hours, to the point when she needed neither him nor any other earthly counsellor, because her condition was grave beyond their touching.

There she lay, under her gay blanket, just as she had lain for so many days. There was a fire in the kitchen, the maids murmured, the babies cried. And beyond the kitchen windows the clumsy cows slumped in to the milking, gates creaked, the sea broke, and broke, and broke on the rocks and sand.

Life went on. The eggs came in with tiny warm feathers clinging to them, gulls circled and flapped over the barnyard, the winter sun went down blood-red across a metallic sea.

But it was all changed. The Señora was dying.

Juanita, dazed, unbelieving, was her mother's nurse; Lolita an able second. But there was no need of nursing. Sometimes the Señora took a sip of iced water, sometimes shook her head. For the rest, she lay quiet, with only now and then a dull, troubled muttering of disconnected words.

On the last afternoon of her life the lamps were lighted at half-past four. Another storm was brewing; leaves blew in the bare yard, and the chickens went to bed in mid-afternoon. The priest had come and gone; the doctor had come and gone, merely saying that there would be no immediate change. He would be back this evening. He imagined, he told Lolita, in a grave aside, that the patient would not rouse again.

Juanita, in the softly lighted room, sat close to her mother's

bed. Of all that she had heard in the past two unreal days she was mercifully able to believe nothing. Her mother looked now exactly as she always did when she had these heavy colds. The girl watched her steadily, fearfully, her own breath coming hard.

"Nita," said her mother quite naturally and clearly, in the silence, opening the eyes that had been shut peacefully all day, "I've been thinking of so many things. Things that I must talk to you about—now that you are grown. We'll have a long talk—the first day I'm strong enough."

"Indeed we will!" Juanita, sliding to her knees, and catching her mother's hand to her cheek, said in a voice deep with tenderness.

"You know the name I was trying to think of?" the Señora asked, with a shade of anxiety. "That's—important," she said painfully. "Don't let me forget it. A cold like this makes one feel—so dull——"

"Darling, don't distress yourself now," Juanita murmured. "It doesn't matter!"

The Señora opened darkened and sunken eyes in a face of lead.

"Sidney Fitzroy," she said distinctly. "That's the name. You won't forget it?"

"Do you want to see him?" Juanita, who had never heard the name before, asked tenderly. "Shall I get him on the telephone?"

"No—no—no!" the Señora said alarmedly. "You must tell nobody that name—not Lola, not anybody—for all our sakes. That's your task, my darling, all alone. It's a queer story, Nita, but when you realize how muddled it was—it was at the time of the earthquake and the big fire, dear, everything was burned. And she knew it!" the dying woman said earnestly, opening wide the eyes she had closed in weariness, and clutching Juanita's hand with fingers already chill. "She knew it," she added, weakly impatient, "the woman

you saw here. But that name is all you need. Tell her that name and she'll know. Sidney Fitzroy——"

"I am to find him, Mother?" Juanita asked, as the feverish, tired voice fell silent.

Again a strange, staring look from the darkening eyes.

"Yes, my darling. You were but ten days old—we brought you here—nobody knows. And nobody must know that name except you! I promised that——"

Silence again. She seemed to be visibly slipping away, into shadows, into darkness. Juanita, chafing the slender, lifeless hand against her own flushed cheek, prayed wildly and blindly. Her mother, who had counted so gently for her music lessons, who had taught her her Catechism, who had tended geraniums and walked up and down, up and down like a cloistered nun under the shaggy peppers and eucalyptus, was going away from her now.

Once more the dark sombre eyes were upon her.

"I had to leave Señora Castellago the rancho," whispered the Señora. "You see you are not an Espinosa, Nita. I had no choice, my darling——"

The whisper died away again, she shut her eyes. Juanita, whose world was rocking and roaring, falling in dust and splinters, laid her bright head against the pillow with a bitter sob.

"Oh, Mother—Mother!"

Feeble fingers were light, chill, on the flyaway gold.

"Not Mother, Nita. I'm not your mother," whispered the ebbing voice. "When you find Sidney Fitzroy——" There was a pause. Then Juanita heard the whisper, "Oh, my God, into Thy hands—into Thy hands——"

"Mother!" the girl cried again, but in agony and fright as well as grief now. "Mother——!"

But the chamber in which her voice resounded, and whose discoloured walls gave back the pitiful sound of it in the chilly winter dusk, was already the resting place of death.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Kent Ferguson came for a second time to the old Espinosa rancho, it was bitter winter, and there was a heavy frost. The December day steamed and shone in the sunshine, to be sure, and the wide sea was cloudless and blue, but the rancho itself looked shrunk and bare, gray frost beaded the pumpkins heaped by a granary door, made the bricks of the sunken paths in the garden treacherous, and stiffened the crushed brown grass.

All the little cabins were shut, the chimneys smoked straight upward into cold, quiet air. Juanita he found huddled over a slumbering wood fire.

The girl, who herself answered his somewhat hesitating knock upon the heavy single panel of the door, was strangely changed, and gave him a long, bewildered look, as she might have given a visitor from another world.

No pleasure lighted the blue eyes that were heavy with wakefulness and tears, strangely big in the white face, and it was with a lifelessness and quiet that completely metamorphosed her that she said, frowning faintly:

"Oh? You? Will you come in?"

After the cold purity of the out-of-door air, the low-browed room seemed dark, scented with wood smoke. Kent bowed his tall head under the shrivelled, leafless honeysuckle vines tangled over the doorway and followed the girl inside.

"I've been thinking about you—and wondering about you," Kent began courageously, "and when some business brought me into your neighbourhood, the best thing seemed to be to come and find out for myself how things are going!"

She had seated herself opposite him, near the little stove. Now, before she could speak, the man said quickly: "But you're——"

He hesitated, stopped short, and he saw the blue eyes in their thick lashes fill suddenly with tears as she tried to smile at him. Kent was seated so near that he might touch her sleeve; he indicated its blackness gently, and added: "Not——?"

For answer, the white face gave an odd impression of contracting, of tightening. He saw her press her trembling lips together. She could not speak.

"Not your *mother!*" Kent exclaimed in a sharp whisper. And as she nodded again, he put his hand over hers and bent nearer her. "My—poor—little—child!" he said slowly.

Juanita, with one agonized glance at him, wrenched her hand free, twisted in her deep chair, hiding her face childishly on her arm, and resting her arm against the high chair back. Kent watched her in speechless distress. He knew that she did not want his touch or his sympathy.

For a few moments she cried passionately, her body shaking with sobs. Then she turned, dried her eyes, pushed the soft slipping masses of loose gold hair somewhat into place, and looked at him bravely, with reddened eyes whose long lashes were sopping, and stuck together like those of a tearful baby.

She began at once to tell him all about it, the sobs that still occasionally shook her breast lessening as she went on with her story. Kent felt as if the little sea gull, the slim girl against whom the fresh ocean winds had blown so freshly and who had laughed in their faces, had been clipped indeed.

He seemed to see it: Death, creeping in here under the low roof, into the rooms faintly scented with damp plaster and with warm wood smoke. The doctor, the priest, the horrified servants with lamps shadowing and lighting their awed faces. The girl, white-faced and silent, following the simple coffin a short mile to the old graveyard beside the Mission.

And death was not all. The Señora had left a will, drawn, perhaps, in accordance with an understanding made with the husband who had died fifteen years before. Juanita was not mentioned therein. A few hundreds in actual cash were all her heritage.

The rancho, the cattle, and the hacienda were all deeded to the late Señora's only living sister, the prosperous Señora Castellago of Mexico City. There appeared to be nothing left. Juanita, kindly mentioned as the late Señora Espinosa's "companion," in communications from the legatee, was invited to remain at the rancho until she could make other arrangements.

The rancho was for sale. Some of the servants had already gone, others were to remain, to care for the stock and the orchards until a new owner should come in.

"But you"—Kent said, stupefied—"weren't you—wasn't the Señora your mother?"

"I always—of course, I thought so!" Juanita answered simply and forlornly. "But it—seems—not. Lola and Lolita say that they remember my being brought here, before I was two weeks old, from San Francisco, supposedly. They have known all along that I was not the Señora's child."

"But, then, who *are* you?" Kent said, with a whimsical and encouraging smile, in a blank silence.

"Ah, that's it," she answered. "I don't know."

"You mean that there were no papers, no letters, nothing to give you a clue?"

"Nothing," she reiterated. "Except," added Juanita after a pause, "that there is a man who knows something, a man that I must find. My mother—I suppose I shall always call the Señora that!—talked of him on the last afternoon of her life. But she was feverish then, and everything was confused to her. She would think that she had told me of him, and then mutter about something else, and then sleep. She said that he would know and that I must find him."

"Who is he and where is he?" Kent demanded practically.

"She spoke of it as a secret," Juanita answered doubtfully. "Do you think I should tell you his name?"

"Well, I doubt if you'll ever find him if you don't tell *somebody*," Kent returned sensibly. "Do you know where he is?"

"I know nothing but his name, and that, being a friend of—of the Señora, he would be middle-aged, probably," Juanita confessed. "She spoke of 'the old Mission' several times. So I've been over there, prowling over the old records—but it was no use. Not there nor in the old town-hall in Monterey, where I thought something might be recorded, is there any such name. But Lola and Lolita are sure—as sure as they can be of anything, for they contradict themselves every minute!—that I was brought, as a very tiny baby, from San Francisco. So you see——"

She indicated, with a half smile that had something pitiful in it, a heap of newspapers on the floor.

"I am looking for a position," she told him. "There is to be a civil service examination. I wrote to ask if I might try for that. And there is a lady advertising for a 'mother's helper,' whatever *that* is. I wrote to her, too. Is that something I could do? It seems to me that if I go to San Francisco, then I can begin my search there. It isn't," Juanita interrupted herself quickly, "that I have any great hopes of this man! I try to convince myself that he is simply some old family friend, whose wife will ask me to dinner—in Alameda," she said, desperately trying to smile, "twice a year! But he *does* know something, and my mother—the Señora, wanted me to find him. And besides," she added, with a pathetic little outspreading of her brown young hands, "it's all I have to go on!"

"Your name, I suppose, *is* Juanita Espinosa?" Kent began, trying to catch a loose thread in the puzzling array of facts.

"I don't even know that!"

"You've hunted all over this place"—a shrug of his shoulder and lift of his head indicated the hacienda—"for clues?"

"Oh, every inch of it!"

"This mysterious man," Kent pursued, frowning, and speaking slowly, as he fitted his thoughts together, "might he be, for example, your father?"

"I suppose he might be!" Juanita conceded.

"H'm!" Kent muttered, dissatisfied. And for a full minute he was silent. Before speaking again, he rustled through the heap of newspapers on the floor and selected from their midst the slim pages of a weekly, the *Argonaut*. These he opened, searched, and finally folded sharply, presenting the paper to Juanita with the eight or ten three line entries under "Help Wanted" brought uppermost.

"Do you see that third one there?" he asked.

The girl read it aloud.

"Wanted: social secretary. Must understand duties, write legible hand, and speak Spanish. Good position for suitable person. Apply Box 91, San Mateo, California."

"I saw that," admitted Juanita, when she had read it. "But I didn't know what a social secretary was. Would it be in an office? Has it anything to do," she asked simply, "with Bolshevism?"

"You are thinking, I gather," Kent assured her seriously, "of the Socialist Party. This is—somewhat—different. A social secretary, for a woman," he went on, "is a young lady who answers the telephone, writes notes, makes herself agreeable, is stepped on whenever her employer is out of humour, and gets paid about seventy dollars a month."

"But this," Juanita submitted doubtfully, "this doesn't *say* it's a woman. Don't men have social secretaries?"

"The reason I call your attention to this," Kent answered,

"is because I know all about it. I know who put that in there, I know what's required, and I think"—he added, with suddenly rising enthusiasm—"I think it's the very job for you! That is," he broke off to say seriously, "if you're sure of your Spanish? That's all-important. You might just as well give up now——"

"My Spanish?" Juanita interrupted in bewilderment. "But it's my mother tongue!"

"You could fool Miss Russell," Kent was musing aloud, "but you certainly couldn't fool Mrs. Chatterton—long."

"Who is Miss Russell," Juanita inquired, "and who is Mrs. Chatterton?"

"Mrs Chatterton is a very beautiful lady and my present employer's wife, and Miss Russell is her present social secretary who is about to be married," Kent explained. "Mrs. Chatterton is in the East, at the moment, expected home in about ten days. And Miss Russell, who has been desperately trying to get somebody to take her place as social secretary, put that advertisement in the *Argonaut* last week. The difficulty is the Spanish. She can get lots of nice girls who can social-secretize, and lots of fusty old woolly women who can speak Spanish. But there seems to be no combination of the two. She never," Kent added, with his handsome face brightened with a whimsical smile, "thought of getting a sea gull!"

"But could I do the rest of it?" Juanita asked anxiously, conceding his pleasantry only a fleeting smile.

"Could you," he asked concernedly, almost sternly, in his turn, "do the Spanish? Mrs. Chatterton is determined to learn to speak Spanish and to learn it in about five months," he added. "She will want conversation about two hours a day."

"But nobody could learn a language in four or five months," Juanita objected dubiously.

"*She* can," Kent said confidently. "You don't know her."

"Is she so clever?" the girl diverged to ask curiously.

Kent was sunk so deep in his big chair that his linked hands dangled between his knees. He did not look up from a half-smiling contemplation of the little wood stove, where flames were sucking gallantly upon stout madrone logs.

"I think we may say she is," he said, in a slightly constrained tone.

"Is she young?" Juanita asked, unexpectedly even to herself.

"Thirty-five—thirty-eight, maybe," the man answered.

"And pretty?" said some hitherto unsuspected impulse moving in Juanita.

"About that, at least," Kent said briskly, raising his head and smiling, "there is no doubt! She is beautiful. She is the old man's—you've heard of Chatterton, the newspaper man?—he owns the San Francisco *Sun*, you know, and the Los Angeles *Record*—she is his second wife. The first wife died. He's got a son by this marriage, a nice kid named Billy, who's in Berkeley, at the University. Mrs. Chatterton is years younger than her husband."

"And she wants the social secretary?" Juanita was straightening it all out.

"She's had this very nice one, Anne Russell, for five years. But Miss Russell is getting married now, and, as I say, they've had the deuce of a time getting another. It's the Spanish."

"And does Miss Russell speak such beautiful Spanish?"

"She doesn't speak Spanish at all. It's only of late months that Spanish has figured in our calculations," Kent explained, with a smile Juanita did not quite understand. "You must know that Mrs. Chatterton is socially ambitious, like most women nowadays," the man went on. "The Chattertons met the Illinois Senator, Babcock, travelling with his family in Albania, last year, and it seems that they were all held there together by some railway tie-up, and the

Babcock child got ill, and the mother, too. Mrs. Chatterton got right in and nursed them both, though it was typhus, or something like that. It's exactly what she *would* do!" Kent interrupted himself to say under his breath, with an admiring shake of his head, and a brief laugh, "and you can imagine that her social pathway in Washington was made pretty smooth by the Babcocks after *that*. She's in Washington now," he resumed. "And I gather that, when the new administration goes in, next spring, there might be a diplomatic appointment for old Chatterton, who would be tickled to death with it—or she's made him think he would," Kent amended, grinning, "and the Chattertons might go to Spain. So that's the explanation of the Spanish social secretary. You're pretty sure," he ended, frowning, "of your Spanish?"

"It's the only thing I *am* sure of," Juanita answered simply.

"Then I don't see why you shouldn't get it!" Kent exclaimed in satisfaction, and in a final tone. "And it's a good job, too!"

"Will you speak to this—Miss Russell about it?" Juanita asked. It seemed so small a thing to ask that she was surprised and hurt to have him glance at her with a rather startled expression and purse his lips dubiously. He had a fashion, she thought resentfully, of offering and then withdrawing his friendship that was maddening; that must make people not like him, Juanita decided.

"I'd better not do that," he said flatly. "Better not have it come from me at all!"

"Very well," the girl agreed proudly. She felt a wave of actual hate against him; he made her feel that her own suggestion had been crude and raw.

"Say that you saw the advertisement in the *Argonaut*," Kent suggested. "You won't have any trouble! And now put your hat on, Miss Juanita, and come for a walk!" he finished abruptly.

She wished she might find spirit enough to decline, but she

had had small heart for walks of late, and the windows were brimming with bright sunlight. The first colour that had stained her cheeks in weeks bloomed there as the sweet fresh breezes touched them.

The air was cold, clear, still, to-day, banks of fog had been driven out to sea and lingered on the horizon, massed forces awaiting a second attack. Beyond the cliffs the ocean brimmed bright and blue, eternally clean, but the crushed, water-stained grass beneath their feet was discoloured and dirty. Cows moved slowly along the shelf-like paths of the rising ground; now and then the air was puzzled by a troubled lowing. An untimely poppy, on its little sprawling stem of frost-bitten, silvery feathers, languished in the brown, dead grass.

Over the whole ranch, wrapped in wide, high winter sunlight and stillness, curved a sky of pale blue-white. A heifer, stumbling awkwardly past them, broke the coffee-coloured ice that filled a frozen wheel track.

To Juanita, who knew every inch of this ground, the long dim shadows of summer sunrises on dew-soaked grass, the mellow April moonlight on apple blossoms, the homely sunset lights striking even so low as the kitchen windows, these days before the parting held a heartache that made even the thought of exile easy. When they turned, on the high bare ridge, to go back to the farmyard, she said, with a sudden memory:

"Why didn't you come tell me, that night of the big wind, that you were caught on the rancho?"

There was a pause, and she knew just what surprised and shamed path his thoughts were taking, before Kent answered:

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to frighten you. I never dreamed you knew that I was here!"

"It wouldn't," the girl said quietly and coldly, "have frightened me! We're not afraid of guests at the rancho."

"I know. I'm awfully, awfully sorry," Kent said humbly.

"I slept in the hay, and a good bed, too, and got away so early in the morning that I hoped, until this minute, I had made no trouble at all!"

"I saw you go away, on a motor bicycle," Juanita told him. And now she saw real concern and astonishment in his look.

"Then you saw——" he began.

"That woman with the veils? Yes. Didn't you?"

"Her car, of course. But you didn't see her face!" Kent said, after a second's pause.

"No," Juanita admitted. "Her voice, and my mother's, woke me. Or rather, it was the car—but then I heard their voices. I was up on the porch, under the pepper tree. But it was only an instant, and I didn't see her face at all! It was just dawn, you know, and I had had a bad night. I had seen you," she added accusingly, "the night before."

"Well," Kent said, after a pause in which he had stared at her, stricken, "all I can say is, I'm sorry. I wouldn't—you know that?—have frightened you for the world."

"It was my mother who would have been frightened," Juanita said simply. And for a few moments they walked along in silence. "How far did you follow that woman?" the girl asked then.

"I stopped for breakfast, down the highway, and after that didn't pick the car up again." Kent stretched a hand for hers as they came to a bad bit of road, and she felt the strength and firmness of his big fingers, and liked the feeling. When she came to this miry puddle again to-morrow, she would remember it. "But what did your mother—what explanation did the Señora give?" he asked naturally.

"None!" Juanita answered, with a rueful smile. "I imagine the woman was some old friend, in trouble—my mother never told me things. I never thought of pressing it. All these old haciendas have their secrets and their mysteries. For all that we talked every evening, almost, my while life

long, there were vital things my mother never told me—my own history, and why I am not to inherit the rancho! Who gave me to her when I was only a tiny baby, who was my father, and what's my name? I don't know. Our people love mysteries and intrigues—the very servants do.

"My mother was Spanish only by marriage," the girl presently added, "but she was New England, too, reserved—reticent—she never talked to anybody freely. It would never have occurred to me to ask her to explain anything she didn't tell me willingly."

"And she never spoke of her visitor?"

"Except when I did ask her, outright, and she said then—well, practically that it wasn't any of my business!"

"You didn't connect this woman's visit with your mother's illness? I mean that the surprise of it—the shock of it——"

She was gazing at him with wide-open, astonished eyes.

"No, though it might have been so," Juanita answered thoughtfully. "It's all," she said, with a hard little frown, "so mysterious, so silly! There can't be anything *right* to make so much secret of, and if it's wrong, then I should have been put on my guard."

They stopped, almost inside the patio now, by the discoloured wall where a bare vine had stretched finely webbed fingers. Inside, the shadows still lingered on frosted grass, a great Indian jar, half filled with water, bore a crust of ice. A gull floated up into the sunshine, other gulls walked like pigeons on the faded pink tiling of the low roof, in the dark wet shadow of the pepper trees. Kent, ravenous now, caught a heartening odour of frying onions and tomatoes, of fresh sour bread.

Juanita, keeping him for the meal, presided in the dark low dining room at a table spread with a dragging white cloth rich with Spanish lace. The turkey-red curtains at the windows were edged with more lace, the stout servant blundered about in voluminous skirts, her white shirt-waist

bulging at the back. Juanita murmured to her in casual Spanish that Kent found a joy to the ear.

"No," the girl said definitely, in a changed voice, when a miscellaneous collection of preserves, cheeses, heavy pastry, fruit, and the rancho's own raisins had been put before them. "I'm going to forget that I'm Juanita Espinosa, of the rancho de los Amigos, I'm going out into the world with a clean slate, and some day—some day, please God, I'll come back and buy it from whoever owns it and live here again!"

"That's the brave way," Kent approved, looking up to smile at her. "One more question. You really think you'd better not tell me the name of the man who *does* know about you, who *might* be of use?"

"Not now," she decided, hesitating. "She said it more than once—'That you must keep a secret—for all our sakes!'"

"Well," he consented reluctantly. And the subject was mentioned no more. But he knew that he had cheered and inspired her, saw already the difference in her manner and look. And when he left her, to swoop away on his motor bicycle into the cold, early afternoon, it was with something almost like gaiety that she said:

"I'll see you, I hope—soon. And don't forget to be a stranger when you meet me!"

CHAPTER V

MR. FERGUSON, Miss Espinosa. This—we hope!—is Mrs. Chatteron's new companion," Anne Russell said pleasantly.

It was in the upstairs study of the Chatterton home in San Mateo, a pleasant, orderly, sun-flooded little room principally furnished by a large, flat-top desk. Anne had been instructing Juanita in her new duties; the girl was dressed in simple black serge with a touch of white at the cuffs. She looked up under a soft blur of gold hair and gave her hand to Mr. Chatterton's private secretary.

"How do you do, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Miss Espinosa. Your name at least," said Kent, lounging in the spare swivel chair opposite her, "indicates that you can *habla Español*, as the shoe shops say, like six o'clock!"

Juanita had been three days in the enormous establishment of Chatterton, but this was her first glimpse of Kent. Her homesick, suppressed heart swelled at sight of him, smiling at her with the handsome dark eyes in the lean, handsome dark face, and showing a flash of white teeth. He and Mr. Chatterton—Miss Russell had chanced to mention—had been in San Francisco for a few days. The mistress of the mansion, the Mrs. Chatterton about whose capability of learning a language in five months there had been so little question, and about whose beauty none, was expected home in a few days more.

"Happy?" Kent found an opportunity to breathe now, when Anne Russell, with her back to them, was answering the telephone.

"Glad to have it," Juanita murmured in answer, with a little shrug. "I'm only afraid I can't *do* it!"

He reassured her with a smile, transacted some business concerning a telegram or two with Miss Russell, and departed with a friendly nod that included both women.

"He's Mr. Chatterton's secretary, I told you that," Anne said, when he was gone. "He's one of the most fascinating men I ever met. I rather fancy—I have no right to say this, either," Anne interrupted herself, but womanlike she immediately said it. "I fancy that he's been a little wild, quarrelled with his own people, maybe. But one feels he's a gentleman, in spite of being——"

She stopped, with a smile and a shrug.

"—being what he is—a sort of engaging ne'er-do-well," Miss Russell pursued, in answer to Juanita's questioning look. "A man of that type acting as private secretary to Mr. Chatterton! Kent Ferguson must be thirty—that's no life—there's no future in it—for him. He's been an actor, he's been on a newspaper, dear knows what he hasn't been!"

"Do you think he's handsome?" Juanita hazarded somewhat shyly.

"Handsome! He's one of the handsomest—I don't know that I ever saw a handsomer man," Anne said surprisedly, almost with shock. "Don't *you* think he is?" she asked.

"I don't know that I ever thought about it at all," Juanita admitted.

"Well," Anne assured her, "other women do. They're all crazy about him."

Going on neatly with accounts, check books, social lists, and correspondence, Juanita Espinosa said that that was nothing to her. But she was sorry Miss Russell had said it; the phrase came back to her more than once during the strange long day.

The days all seemed long and strange now, yet they were

not unhappy ones. It was simply that she did not count first with anyone; she must make other persons' requirements and pleasure her business now, no longer her own. The only happiness for Juanita lay in making herself useful, indispensable, to other people. It was hard, and lonely; fortunately she was too constantly employed to brood about it very much.

She busied herself with pathetic eagerness under Anne Russell's tutelage, and the latter liked her from the first. Juanita was willing, she did speak Spanish, and she was well brought up, Anne ranged her qualifications. Perhaps—it was really the only drawback—she was a little young. There was Billy Chatterton to think of, his father's only son, twenty-one years old.

"However," thought Miss Russell, who at twenty-eight was ecstatically happy at the prospect of becoming the second wife of a middle-aged missionary, "Billy never bothered *me!*" And she went on hopefully instructing Juanita in the new duties and conditions of her life as a social secretary.

Juanita found it all, at first, depressingly big and confusing. But by degrees it smoothed itself into a pattern that, if enormous, was at least comprehensible.

To begin with, there were ten or more house servants, and almost that many outside men, chauffeurs, gardeners, men who swept paths and shook rugs and wound clocks. There were a housekeeper, a cook and a pastry cook, a valet, housemaid, a laundress, a sewing woman, two butlers, and a sort of undermaid of Mrs. Chatterton, who had, Juanita gathered, her own favourite maid with her.

With most of these Juanita naturally had nothing to do, but Miss Russell warned her that she must be ready to serve in almost any capacity if unexpected need arose. In the care of the flower vases, the mail, messages, telephone

calls, Juanita would have need of all her diplomacy and skill.

"The main thing," Miss Russell warned her earnestly, "is not to have Mrs. Chatterton worried—*ever*."

"Doesn't"—Juanita asked calmly, indicating a finely executed portrait of the master of the house—"doesn't *he* ever worry her?"

"He adores her," Anne said, a little scandalized. "Everyone does."

"But he looks like her father!" Juanita protested. She was quite able to appreciate the beauty and youth of her new mistress, even though she had not yet seen her. The house was full of lovely pictures of her; great shadowy photographs of a nobly serious face lit with dark eyes; full-length portraits displaying the exquisite figure, the superb arms and throat; a dry-point etching in a dashing tipped hat; an enormous painting on the stairs of a dark woman wrapped in a fringed cream-and-watermelon shawl; another painting, in Mr. Chatterton's study, of a smiling face, white furs, and pearls; and the new Herter masterpiece, severe black evening dress, plain dark hair, plainly stretched matchless arms and upheld chin, against a background starkly white.

Juanita read resolution, independence, charm, into all the pictures. She tried to imagine the stiff, well-groomed, golf-playing, bridge-playing man of sixty as this radiant creature's husband.

"You mustn't judge Mr. Chatterton now, he's always fussy and ill at ease—nothing goes right, nothing suits him when she's away," Miss Russell told Juanita.

"Is she so strict?" the girl, bewildered with details, asked once in awe.

"She's a perfectly delightful person, and you'll adore her," was Anne's answer. "But I may as well warn you," she added, "that she doesn't take lightly what—well, what

you and I might take lightly. To forget a telephone message, or to do even the smallest thing that would jeopardize her—her social standing, is the one thing Mrs. Chatterton won't—and can't—forgive."

"How could you possibly jeopardize another person's social standing?" Juanita asked directly.

"Easily," Miss Russell said seriously, "especially—especially if that social standing was at all—shaky," she added impressively. "I'm speaking to you confidentially. For some purpose that seems good to her, Mrs. Chatterton wants to be supreme in society here. And she will be. But it's a sort of game, and you must know the rules before you begin it!

"For example," she went on quite unsmilingly, as Juanita looked at her, a little scared. "When I first came here a certain Mrs. Hamilton, one of the social leaders, held a meeting for some charity at her house, and we went. When we got home, I said to Mrs. Chatterton that I had picked up her beautiful beaded bag, which had slipped to the floor. She went," Anne added, with a reminiscent and quite unresentful look, "into a rage—she does that sometimes. She had dropped it deliberately, do you see?—so that she might telephone later and get into personal touch with Mrs. Hamilton over its recovery."

"For—heaven's—sake!" Juanita said slowly. And fearfully she added, "I shall be in hot water all the time!"

"Oh, no, you won't," Miss Russell assured her heartenningly. "The only thing is to remember to do *nothing* on your own initiative where these people are concerned. In every other way, she'll leave a lot to you, but she has set her heart upon becoming the leader here, and she knows exactly how to do it and how long it will take. Leave that to her. Don't volunteer any information to callers, or give any opinion as to what she can or will do. For instance, if an invitation is telephoned," Miss Russell continued, speaking gravely and in real warning, "don't say that Mrs. Chatterton

is engaged for Sunday. It may be that that Sunday engagement will be thrown sky-high for this new chance."

"I see," Juanita said slowly.

"And for the rest," said Miss Russell, "you *do* speak Spanish?"

Juanita smiled as she nodded for the twentieth time. Miss Russell's anxiety on this point, and Kent's, were funny to her. Both seemed sure that in this requirement Mrs. Chatterton would almost positively not be satisfied, whereas it was the single point upon which the girl knew she might feel confident of herself.

Kent she rarely saw; she had, perhaps, two glimpses of him in the strange, bewildering ten days when she studied the new work and the new environment, and awaited the mistress's return, that she might know whether or not she was to be engaged. Carwood Chatterton, she saw now and then, a stately middle-aged man with a benign brow and silvering hair, a somewhat "fussy" man, the servants said, and certainly a strangely self-indulgent, luxury-loving one. His jellied soup, his blankets, the adjustments of his windows or his linen, upset the whole house sometimes, Juanita was informed. But for her first week under his roof, she saw only an imposing figure, with golf clubs, or driving a European-made car, or faultless in evening dress, ready for his epicurean dinner and his game of bridge.

One day, when she had been almost a week in her new position, Anne came smiling upstairs, and informed her that Mr. Chatterton wanted to see her in the library.

Juanita's eyes lighted with wild surprise and terror.

"Me? What—what on earth does he want me for?"

"Cribbage! He's got a cold, and he can't seem to scare up a bridge game, and he's been moping about like a crazy man. I went in there with some telegrams, and—seeing his cribbage board, I remembered hearing you say more than once that you used to play with your mother." Anne's

mild eyes grew alarmed in turn. "You *do* play, I suppose?" she asked keenly.

Juanita laughed joyously.

"I *do* play cribbage and I *can* speak Spanish!" she assured the other girl confidently. "But—but I suppose it's all right for one of the slaves to be found playing cards with the master?" she added, narrowing her eyes.

"My *dear!* Anything we can do to make *him* happy——!" Anne exclaimed. So Juanita washed her hands, and swept a brush over her bright hair, and went running through big hallways and down wide stairs to that especially intimate and luxurious study where Carwood Chatterton, the cribbage board already laid out with cards and pegs, on a green table before him, was awaiting her.

At first, accepting her company with a few courteous words, he played carelessly, instructing her with every card. But Juanita played as well as he did and had all the luck of the morning as well.

She laughed youthfully, the babyish laugh that went so well with her scarlet cheeks and flyaway bright hair, as she scored point after point and game after game. Presently the old man roused himself, began to peg and discard scowlingly, watched the turn of the card with that anxious concentration that is the proof of a contest.

A wood fire burned in the study, rain dripped and spattered on the terrace outside the windows. Soft lamps burned noiselessly; the air was sweet with violets. Once or twice a footman came in, to stir the blaze, or lay on a fresh log, and once Kent Ferguson came in, with papers in his hands, and looked amazed at the sight of Juanita staidly dealing his old employer six cards, and the sound of Juanita's decorous voice: "Your lead."

After that she was often in demand, and she came to like the old man, in the pitying fashion of daring youth for slow and cautious age. It was not that he was so very old, either.

but his thoughts came stiffly; he was a snob, a reactionary, conventional, fearful, easily alarmed by any innovation in the social or political world.

Yet Juanita was obliged to like him, for he was invariably kind and courteous to her, and she knew—from the little cut-and-dried pleasantries he occasionally introduced into the cribbage game, his excitement and gratification over the cards, that he thoroughly enjoyed the hours they spent together. He bored her with his deliberate talk about his collections of engravings, and sometimes she thought she would go mad when he delayed her by the fire and, carefully wiping his glasses, described to her his own astuteness in the treatment of some collector or dealer; but, on the whole, the cribbage playing introduced a pleasant element into her new life, none the less because she hoped it would be one more strong link in the chain that would hold her here.

He told her reluctantly that his son, the adored Billy, never had learned to play cribbage.

"Bright boy," he said, shaking his handsome old head. "Extraordinarily bright boy. But he *can not* learn this game—can't grasp it—isn't interested! Pity, too. You'll meet the boy when his mother gets here," said Carwood Chatterton, polishing his glasses. "You'll see him. But naturally, with Mrs. Chatterton at home"—he always glanced at her beautiful portrait as he mentioned her "—with Mrs. Chatterton at home, we are all much more social—much more social! However, you'll meet the boy."

Juanita, who felt a certain passive interest in the heir to all this magnificence, rather doubted that she would. Already the telephone had been jingling for days with invitations for Billy. Anne said that "Billy was never home," and Kent had observed that the kid only occasionally used his big rooms to bathe and sleep.

More than that, in an establishment as formal and as enormous as this one, fifty persons might have been housed,

without ever crossing each other's pathways unless they chose. The house was in style Italian, set upon round low hills, in the oak park of a magnificent estate.

A mile away, there were chained gates upon the road, great walls of brick shut in the two hundred lordly acres. There were a swimming pool and rose gardens, sunken gardens, dials, statuary, tennis courts, a golf course, marvellous bridle roads, conservatories, fruit and vegetable gardens.

The house was almost completely surrounded by terraces and glassed verandas, where red tiles, awnings, potted hydrangeas, magazine stands, great floor cushions, wicker chairs, winged Japanese goldfish, and gaudy parrots, suggested lounging at all hours of the day. Inside were enormous rooms filled with exquisite rugs, furniture from Europe and New England and the Orient, books, glorious flowers spilling themselves from clear glass vases and big jars—"A parlour and a dining room?" Juanita mused, smiling at her old ideas of a home. Here there were at least three dining rooms, and several rooms that might be variously described as parlours, libraries, billiard rooms, smoking rooms; the arched doors, hung with their heavy curtains, ramified endlessly through beautiful wide spaces.

There were sitting rooms above, too, and spacious bedrooms and bathrooms and dressing rooms and sleeping porches uncountable. Juanita learned, in a day or two, to find her own small bright chintzy quarter in a wing, without the embarrassment of asking a passing maid for help. She and Anne Russell had their meals in a small, pleasant dining room that branched off somewhere among the pantries and china closets, and had one window on a trim gravelled and lawned side drive.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE day before his mother was expected to arrive, the young son of the family returned from a holiday visit to friends in the southern part of the state. Billy Chatterton was an undergraduate in Stanford University, and even as she was entirely familiar with her new mistress's beautiful features through the photographs that were strewn all over the house, so Juanita had found herself more than once attracted to pictures of Billy.

He was twenty-one, she knew, a normal, healthy, athletic, popular twenty-one—his parents' idol. Evidently, both father and mother idolized the only son. On Mrs. Chatterton's dressing table was a splendid picture of the smiling, handsome young man, and in her upstairs sitting room another, and Billy had returned the compliment by giving the place of honour on his desk to a miniature of his lovely mother.

When Juanita saw him she thought him handsomer than his picture; it would have been hard to find fault with his appearance, or with the pleasant openness and simplicity with which he came up to Miss Russell and herself and was introduced.

She and Anne had gone out to one of the terraces, upon a blue and brilliant winter morning after hard rains. The air was as balmy as spring, and the last great galleons of cloud were hurrying, with ballooning sails, from a turquoise sky. Sun poured down through the bared vines; birds hopped and chattered at the fountain; a gardener was gently shaking the heavy water from chrysanthemums and starry cosmos blooms, and two men, with broad, long-handled brushes,

were pushing the wet, accumulated yellow leaves across the red-tiled floor of the terrace.

Juanita was exhilarated by the winy clearness of the fresh, wet air, the steady warm sweetness of the sun, the drowning rushes of scent from shrubs and late flowers. She watched the tiles steam themselves dry, after the brooms had passed, watched a bird whirl his dizzy flight into the blue, and smiled at a demure maid, shaking a duster at an upper window, where the white curtains were pinned back, and the sashes opened so widely that the big house seemed to be eagerly drinking its fill of sunshiny weather, too.

A bulldog with bat-wing ears limped his way toward them, wagging his tail, and Juanita, who had befriended him before this, began to claw fondly at his big head and rumple the rough loosely pleated skin. His master, a big smiling boy, followed him.

Juanita blinked with her faint questioning frown at Billy Chatterton, when Miss Russell introduced them, and followed the frown with her own shy smile and the glance of uplifted blue eyes through the drift of her gold hair.

She saw a clean-skinned, fair-haired young man, athletically built, honest of glance, and irreproachably dressed. Juanita was no critic of masculine attire, but she felt at once that Billy's clothes and the way he wore them were correctness itself. She liked his vital, square hands, his endearing quick smile, and the flash of white teeth that accompanied almost everything he said.

When he took out his cigarette case, and tapped the cigarette on its lid, she caught the faint combined odours of fine soap, toilet waters, and a fresh, firm skin that was tanned by life out of doors. There was a charming ease, a bright and admirable poise, about everything he said and did—he was a young aristocrat, accustomed to fine linen, sports, cultivated voices, luxury, his own way with motor cars, servants, amusements, life generally. Juanita felt

quite definitely that Billy Chatterton would expect the girls he knew to know all about golf and horseback riding and French, and the big North Atlantic liners, and New York and Florida and Hawaii, and the new styles and dances and slang, and she thought that he would probably despise a girl who was deficient in this knowledge. She had never seen quite so polished and so assured a young man, and she felt shyness envelop her as she pulled at Micky's ears and tried to conquer a thickness and dryness in her throat.

"He needs a bath, this feller," Billy observed.

"Is he—naturally white?" Juanita, to whom Micky's blotchy gray-white skin always had looked dirty, asked.

"Are you white, boy?" Billy asked the dog, instead of answering, while his fine hand shared with Juanita's the rubbing of his ears. "Like dogs?" he questioned.

"I like this one," admitted Juanita, looking up. "But it would be terrible to be so ugly," she added, half aloud, as Micky grinned at them with a mouthful of horrible protruding teeth.

"I suppose you know that they're *supposed* to look like that?" Billy asked quickly, even with a touch of haughtiness.

"I suppose they are," Juanita assented, with a little flying smile.

But what she said had little to do with what Billy was feeling. He was astonished at her beauty, here in this bath of glorious morning sunlight, astonished really to discover no imperfection in her, even at this close range. Her skin, the soft lift of her eyes, the expressions that played about her mouth, the mist of soft gold hair at the white nape of her neck, and her slender little body in its plain dress, were all quite astonishingly lovely.

"Well, Jenny's got a mighty pretty girl, and a sweet one, too, this time," he thought. He sometimes, because he knew his audacity and impertinence amused her, called his mother Jane or Jenny. "Miss Russell is all very well,"

thought Billy, as he idled and made talk beside the two girls in the sunshine, "but this girl is an absolute knock-out!"

He explained that he was running in his car into San Mateo and would gladly execute any commissions for Miss Russell —for either of them. Miss Russell looked thoughtful, but said no, that she had no commissions. Juanita explained that she was going into town that afternoon, with one of the men, to buy several things. She thanked Mr. Chatterton most kindly, but they were things, she assured him, that he couldn't get for her.

"I'm getting them for the servants down on the rancho where I used to live," Juanita explained. "Handkerchiefs, boxes, things like that, for Christmas, you know."

"I would be glad to try, at least," Billy assured her, with a blurred idea that he might thus save her money—poor kid, she was probably breaking herself for Christmas presents. "I have excellent taste, I wouldn't get anything loud—nothing too gay, you know. Nothing vulgar! Just a sweet, dignified symbol of Yuletide."

"I wouldn't be afraid of your getting them too *gay*," Juanita answered him quite literally, a trifle confused by his cheerful manner and unembarrassed flow of words.

"Oh, Miss Espinosa," he said, "you underestimate me! I *assure* you I'm gay. I'm almost—wild, aren't I, Miss Russell?"

"You're slightly touched, I think," Miss Russell answered indulgently. The conversation was making her uneasy, and she was planning at the instant to terminate it. Of course, she herself would be safely aboard the *Nippon Naru* in a few weeks, bound for China and the Reverend Henry Pilgrim, but it would not do to blink at anything meanwhile which Mrs. Chatterton would rightly resent in the interest of Billy.

"I meant," Juanita was explaining, "that these people are all Mexicans, Spanish peasants, and they *like* things gay."

"Then I'm the boy for them!" Billy said simply. "Say,

listen," he added animatedly, "why don't you come in to San Mateo now, with me? I'll be there an hour or two; you'll have lots of time."

Miss Russell signalled him a determined and disapproving negative, but he did not see it. Whether Juanita would have had what Miss Russell mentally characterized as sense enough to decline the offer, Miss Russell could not say. For before they spoke again Kent Ferguson joined them.

He came across the terrace with his indifferent easy gait, and greeted them all easily, a little special flash in his eyes as they met Juanita's.

"Well," he said, "we are all signed, sealed, and delivered. Her ladyship left Chicago last night, she's decided suddenly not to visit the Palmers there, and she says she'll be here in time to say 'Merry Christmas'!"

"Oh, that's lovely," Miss Russell said, with genuine feeling, and Billy added, "Good for her."

"Mr. Chatterton just got the telegram," Kent further stated, "and consequently all plans are to be changed, and he'll drive in to meet her day after to-morrow. Bill, you going to San Mateo?" he added casually.

"I've been trying to persuade Miss Espinosa that I could help her with her Christmas presents," Billy observed. Did Anne and Kent exchange just a fleeting, doubtful glance as he said it, Juanita wondered? She suspected so, and although she did not understand its significance, the blood came into her face as she shook her head in smiling refusal at Billy and walked demurely with Anne toward the house.

The younger boy turned away, but Kent loitered along, with his characteristic air of indifference, with the two girls. Miss Russell left them, trimly and neatly mounting the stairs in the tow of an agitated maid who couldn't, it appeared, remember where Mrs. Chatterton liked her telephone to stand, and Kent detained Juanita with a light touch on her shoulder.

The hallways, opened and sunshiny, were all space and airiness this morning. The mere announcement of the mistress's return had seemed to flood the place with new vitality and activity.

"How goes it?" Kent asked, as they stopped at a French window that had been opened wide upon a low iron railing and a stretch of wet, shining garden. The sun was golden upon the great shafts of the trees, even the shadows to-day seemed to tremble with light.

"It goes very well," Juanita responded with a nervous little smile. "Of course, we won't know anything," she added, somewhat anxiously, "until Mrs. Chatterton decides!"

"I think she'll decide 'Yes'," Kent said, with his slow smile through narrowed eyes.

"Oh, if she does——!" Juanita exclaimed fervently.

"You mean you want to stay?" the man asked, obviously pleased.

"Oh, yes!" she said. And then, a little more moderately, she added, "It's a wonderful position for me. It's a start!"

"You've adapted yourself to it in a manner that is really astonishing," Kent said, in a big-brotherly tone of approval. "Have you done anything about the other matter, the search?" he asked.

Juanita glanced about her, lowered her voice.

"I've searched through the San Francisco Directory, and all the Oakland and Berkeley directories—they happen to be here in the drug store," she reported, her eyes anxious again.

"No sign of him?"

"None."

"He must," Kent remarked suggestively, "have a somewhat peculiar name?"

She would not be baited. But she looked at him gravely.

"I will have to tell you his name," she admitted, "if I get nothing. A secret," Juanita continued seriously, "can be too *much* of a secret, I suppose."

"About that, something occurred to me," Kent said. "It may lead to nothing. But the presumption is that, as a baby, you were brought to the rancho from San Francisco?"

"Of that I'm almost sure!" Juanita assented expectantly.

"Then, naturally, one feels that this man—I keep thinking of him as your father—is, or was, in San Francisco?"

"Well, yes. I've been working with that in mind."

"Your mother, you remember," Kent said, "mentioned 'the old Mission'—seemed to be worrying about the old Mission?"

"Yes, and I went there, several times! They let me see all the old records—I thought a marriage might be recorded there, or even my own baptism. But there was nothing—not so far back as sixty—seventy years ago."

"Had it occurred to you," Kent pursued, "for it suddenly did to me, that she might have meant the San Francisco Mission—there's an old Mission there, you know!"

The colour rushed into her face, her eyes flashed like blue stars. She looked up at him, his kind, clever, handsome face, with its suggestion of indifference, of nonchalance, and she thought suddenly how much she liked him, longed to understand him, and to be somehow significant in his life, and she was still.

"Worth trying!" the man said carelessly.

"Worth trying!" she echoed. "But how," Juanita asked, dashed by a second thought, "how could I manage it?"

"You can ask Mrs. Chatterton to let you go into town some day. She'll be off to Santa Barbara or San Francisco—she might even take you there," Kent said. "And—I wish I could manage to be with you," he said thoughtfully, as if annoyed by a detail. "I'll try," he added, beginning to turn away, "I'll try to arrange it, some day when the holidays are over. And, by the way," he added, turning back, "you're going into San Mateo this afternoon?"

"That's one of the funny things," Juanita said, half smil-

ing and half ashamed, "I can go off for Thursday afternoons if I want to!"

"Like Lizzie the Virtuous Second Girl," the man suggested.

"It feels like it. Not that any servant ever leaves the rancho for Thursday afternoon or any other afternoon!" Juanita said, laughing vexedly. "But in books, Thursday's always 'Annie's afternoon off.' However, I'm going to do my Christmas shopping this afternoon."

"Going to walk?" Kent asked, as if her answer mattered to him not at all.

"Why—I didn't think of it. But it's only a short two miles, and I get so little exercise!" Juanita mused aloud. "I believe I will—that's a good idea."

"About half-past two?"

"Well, I suppose so. After lunch." The girl was surprised by his tone, and more surprised still when he said, "Wait for me. I'll meet you right here and walk in with you."

So they walked together in the cold, still afternoon. The morning's sunshine had vanished, a quiet pall of white covered the sky, the roads were blown bare by winds, but there were leaves heaped up by the fences, and the smoke of more than one odorous wood fire ascended straight into the heavy air.

Lawns were blotched blackly with fertilizer, in some places the hydrangeas and petunias had been snugly bedded in straw. There were wreaths hung in some windows already, and when they reached the outskirts of the village they saw that almost every shop showed Christmas trees, shut like umbrellas, and tottering against fruit boxes, or gaily piled red and gold coasters and scooters, or turkeys, stark and pallid, with bloody ruffs neatly cuffed with brown paper.

Children were skipping and chattering beside their shopping elders. Maiden women, in the little stationery store, were debating over pale gilded cards on which crosses, stars

and snowy hills were spattered frugally with gold dust.

Juanita entered upon her small purchases with enthusiasm; Kent watched her with a sort of wistful pleasure. She was so young, in her rough, snugly buttoned black coat, so pretty, with her gold hair and blue eyes as innocently bright as a Christmas angel on a card.

She got Lolita and Dolores and Luisa, who were comparatively young, boxes of handkerchiefs, but the babies were more elaborately remembered, and for old Lola, Juanita bought a rather brilliant suitcase, of shiny, light brown "leathernere," stamped in an alligator-skin pattern and priced at two dollars.

"She goes off, regularly, to visit the whole tribe, 'way down as far as Tia Juana," Juanita said elatedly, "and she always takes her things in a bundle of newspaper. She'll be delighted!"

Kent lounged after her, interested, in his rather casual way, in what she was doing, occasionally unhooking an object to give it to her for her inspection, and once protesting.

"It seems to me I wouldn't send that to a kid—send him something he can't break and swallow."

"That," Juanita said, with a thoughtful glance, "is an excellent idea."

"Well, come on, now," he said presently, when she was beginning to feel really tired and the short afternoon had closed down into darkness. "Let's have tea."

"Tea?" Juanita echoed, pleased. "Where?"

"At the Daisy Chain; that's the best."

Fluttered, she walked beside him in the dark street past the windows that were packed with colour and gushing with light, and into the warm little tea shop already scented with orange pekoe and gingerbread. Juanita settled herself in one of the little lounges with a wriggle of sheer felicity.

"Isn't this *fun!*"

"Is it?" he asked, watching her.

"I suppose," Juanita said, suddenly looking rather solemn, when the tea was ordered, and she had counted her bundles, and indulged in a little reminiscent complacency as to her purchases, "I suppose it's all *right* for me to do this?"

"To do what?" Kent asked unencouragingly. "Have tea with me? That," he said, with just a hint of a sneer, infinitely distressing to Juanita, "is one of the privileges of being a working woman."

He seemed suddenly to be in rather a black mood; it made Juanita uneasy, and she said, with a little uncomfortable laugh:

"Is one of my privileges to—offer to—split the bill?"

For answer, he looked at her so darkly that she knew she had really offended him, and her heart sank.

"I hate that sort of cheap talk—all men do," he assured her rudely.

Juanita was tired, and the near approach of Christmas was tugging painfully at her heartstrings, despite her gallant attempt to make the holidays seem a time of gaiety and happiness. She looked down at the little blue plate, and the butter ball, and the microscopic portion of marmalade before her, and they swam in a blur of arrows and fiery darts.

She wished she had never come shopping or included Kent in her plan: at any rate, wished above all things that she had not allowed him to take her to tea.

They sat in absolute silence, until Juanita saw cinnamon toast and a little Japanese teapot of pale green china before her, and blindly began to pour herself tea, and to fight the threatening tide of tears with prosaic bread and butter.

The little table lamp, softly mellow, shone upon her flushed, downcast face, the plain little black gown moved up and down convulsively over her fast-beating heart, the light made an aureole of her fair hair against her hat.

When she had somewhat recovered her equilibrium, and, breaking into a second piece of toast, could dare a glance at

Kent, she found him with one elbow on the table and his chin resting upon his palm, while he studied her. Instantly her colour was up again, but there was no further danger of tears, and Juanita could ask, concernedly, "Aren't you having anything?"

For answer, he busied himself indifferently with his own teapot, presently saying:

"I'm sorry I blew up. But I get sick of being so poor that a little—that a girl like you can't have tea with me without pitying me!"

"Upon my word, I never thought of pitying you!" Juanita exclaimed indignantly. "I was only thinking of being independent, that was all. It was a joke. I know the tea here is thirty-five cents, and I certainly wasn't worrying about *that!*"

"Yes, I know," he said. "But if you had had tea here with—well, with young Bill Chatterton, I don't imagine you would have thought of it. However——" His tone lightened, sudden interest came into his eyes. "Nice kid, isn't he?" he said.

"He seems a *dear*," Juanita said warmly.

"Did it ever occur to you that you are a sort of a dear yourself?" Kent asked her, with a smile so sweet and so unexpected that all the happiness came back into Juanita's heart and she felt that she could talk and laugh with him again. "You're so darned *young*," he said affectionately and whimsically, "so gold and pink and sweet—and good." And before she could be embarrassed, he was talking away in his best mood—the old mood of that first afternoon on the rocks, when he had seemed merely an unusually interesting and nice and friendly young man.

Afterward, it appeared that Johnson, one of the Chatterton mechanicians, was waiting for them with the small closed car, so Juanita and her bundles came home safely, and the afternoon of shopping became a golden memory, after all.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day messages and flowers and callers besieged the house, and the telephone bell never stopped. Mrs. Chatterton would reach San Francisco at three o'clock, San Mateo at four, just two days before Christmas, and although Juanita kept telling herself that her mistress presumptive was really nothing to her, and she less than nothing to the brilliant Mrs. Chatterton, she could not but feel a little thrill, as she wandered about, when the actual time of arrival came. Wood fires were burning everywhere, the place bloomed like a June garden indoors, despite the wintry bareness of the world without. Miss Russell showed her Mrs. Chatterton's beautiful suite, exquisite in its smoky cream and green French furniture, its dull silky rugs, its great taffeta pillows in old rose and moss-green. Violets made the air sweet, the new magazines were ranged on her table. "And I shall be in here for two hours before dinner, going over her mail," said Miss Russell. "Justine will be brushing her hair, somebody changing her slippers, the telephone will ring and ring—ah, you won't know the house when she's here!"

"She can't do more than fire me," Juanita said sturdily. But in her heart she prayed that she would be retained in this fascinating, this vaguely exciting atmosphere.

After endless flurries, endless delays, the moment came, and Miss Russell and Juanita crouched on the landing to observe the homecoming.

First came a maid with furs and a man with rugs; then Billy, tall, in a belted polo coat; then Mr. Chatterton, courtly,

delighted, fussy, and then a well-made, beautifully groomed woman who looked no more than thirty-three or thirty-five, slim in a marvellous tailored suit, smiling under a tipped hat brimming with aigrettes, rustling, laughing, jingling, dominating everything with a clear-cut, somewhat affected voice, and with quick sentences in a distinctly English accent.

"Oh, but how charm-ming—really. It's all extraordinarily sweet to get back to! Oh, lovely—quite—lovely! Elsie—Bates—Mrs. Murdock"—she was greeting the servants—"so nice to see you all again!"

Juanita was just above her as she tossed furs, gloves, and loose outer coat to a maid, and coming close to her ruddy, gallant old husband, caught his cheeks in her hands and said laughingly, "Carwood, you've missed me most horribly?"

"My dear—my dear—" he said, almost stammering in pleasure and confusion, "I've been an absolute bear!"

"I don't believe it," she said merrily. "Oh, there you are!" The last phrase was for Kent Ferguson, who came out of the study with a paper in his hand. To Juanita, watching from above, he looked very handsome, loosely built, tall, his dark head smooth, a smile in his slightly narrowed eyes as he crossed the splendid hall.

"Oh, hello!" he said mildly. "I had no idea—four o'clock, is it? Awfully, awfully nice to see you back." They stood looking at each other a moment, and then Mrs. Chatterton, as her husband turned away, said amusedly, with a slow, indulgent smile:

"How dare you even try it! You know you've been watching the clocks!"

"Well, maybe I have," Kent said, with a smile and a grin.

That was all. He held her hand a few seconds, and then some friends came in with a rush of laughter and welcome, and then others, and Juanita heard their babel of pleasant, rich voices, and caught the fragrance of violets, of furs spattered with the light rain that was falling, of perfumes.

They all moved toward the library, there was firelight there, tea, cocktails, more arrivals. The maids went quietly about catching great armfuls of fur, carrying trays.

The mistress of the house had come home.

It was almost six o'clock when she came slowly upstairs, this time lightly leaning upon her son's big arm. He was laughing, teasing, murmuring amusedly with his mother, who paused once, facing him squarely on the stairs, with a half-laughing and half-scandalized protest at some reported escapade.

"Billy Chatterton—I never heard anything quite so shameless!"

"I give you my word!"

"And you are—you are glad to have me back again?" the woman asked, with a sort of pretty luxuriance in her own charm and power.

"Jenny, old girl!" Billy answered disrespectfully, "there's nobody in the whole world like you!"

Miss Russell, escaping before them from her eavesdropping with Juanita, had hastily drawn the younger girl into a little study on the same floor as Mrs. Chatterton's suite, and they were giggling and clinging together there when, unexpectedly, Mrs. Chatterton herself opened the door.

"Anne!" said the beautiful imperious voice, "Anne Russell, where are you?"

"Oh, Mrs. Chatterton!" Miss Russell laughed, in confusion and apology, as she touched a light, "we were just shamelessly peeping over the banister! We saw you arrive, and then we got through quite a heap of letters here, and then we were watching again when you came up!"

The light over the desk was illumined, and the little study flooded with an even cone of green radiance in which Miss Russell's honest, flushed young face was fully lighted. But

Juanita, black-clad, with her flying soft gold aureole about her broad forehead, was still in shadow.

Perhaps the mistress was not displeased with this eager espionage, for there was a half smile on her lips as she said:

"Oh, come—won't you see enough of me, getting through all the hard work we have to do in the next few days! I've two trunks of Christmas presents and not a card written or a ribbon tied! Mr. Chatterton," his wife added negligently, "tells me you have found me a secretary, Anne. I suppose you're still set upon being eaten by cannibals and drowned in floods in that heathen place?"

"Quite," Anne assured her smilingly. Mrs. Chatterton had turned away now, pausing in the hallway only to say negligently over her shoulder:

"I think, perhaps, I sha'n't go down to dinner, Anne. I feel tired and frightfully dirty and all the rest of it. Come in, won't you, in about half an hour, and bring any letters or messages that seem important, and—by the way, you might bring Miss———" A careless nod indicated the shadow that was Juanita. "Although," drawled Mrs. Chatterton, moving away, "she understands, of course, that the Spanish is the important thing, and that I will—positively—have to have Señor Morenas decide about that!"

She went into her own room, Billy leaving her reluctantly, to go with flying thumping steps to his own quarters on the floor above.

There was life enough now in the big house that had been so quiet, Juanita, thrilled, impressed, a little resentful, said to herself. This lovely gracious insolent woman appeared to radiate it. Doors opened and shut. Telephones trilled. Maids came and went. Anne Russell somewhat nervously arranged the sheaf of letters that had been ready since early morning, somewhat nervously coached her understudy in her part.

And at about seven o'clock the two women went into Mrs. Chatterton's bedroom together.

She had had her bath now, was powdered, perfumed, robed in some combination of lettuce-green taffeta and coffee lace, so delicately puffed and flounced and ribboned that Juanita could only think of a saucy little inverted French lampshade turned into an exquisite and living reality.

Her own maid, the Frenchwoman Justine, was completing the operation of washing her rich, reddish-brown hair, fluffing it softly in hot towels, pressing the white temples with sympathetic fingers, massaging the scalp. Juanita, whose quick blue eyes missed nothing, saw that the white, pink-nailed hands had been treated; they were not aristocratic hands, they were a little blunt, a little square, but their texture and colour were faultless.

Mrs. Chatterton had beautiful, large, bright brown eyes, her face was well shaped, the skin sensitive and white, and the colour a brunette's rich, bright glow. Her mouth was small, her smile flashed into view small, regular teeth, pearly white. She gave an immediate impression of vitality and personality; to herself Jane Chatterton was the centre of the universe, and everyone in her immediate neighbourhood became instantly aware of it.

However languidly, however carelessly she spoke, even to the least significant of her servants, it was never without consciousness of herself. Her requests to a taxi-driver or a waiter might be indifferent, but they were never unconsidered. Hers was the type that must have homage from all sides; she boasted that her very deck stewards, her dentist and doctor, adored her.

Now, as always, she was playing a part, "showing off," Juanita characterized it. But she was doing it charmingly, and to watch her was like watching an actress in a favourite rôle. If distinguished diplomats, men of power, position, title, had been about, Jane Chatterton would have charmed

them. As it was, her maids, her little secretary and under-secretary, were not beneath her steel.

"I'm going down to dinner after all, Anne," she said, as Miss Russell came in, "and if we could get through most of this"—she glanced at the correspondence Miss Russell carried—"it would mean that I could rest late in the morning."

The bright eyes, diverted from the row of shining finger nails she studied before buffing them lightly again upon the taffeta cover that lay over her feet, found Juanita.

"This is the young lady, Anne?" she asked, looking frankly and steadily at the younger girl. "Sit down, both of you. You've explained, of course, Anne," pursued Mrs. Chatterton, in her pleasantly modulated, unhurried voice, "that, just at the moment, the Spanish is the important thing? Señor Morenas will come to me three times a week. But every day—every day I *must* have conversation—that's—don't pull so, Justine, I've a slight train headache—that's imperative."

"Miss Espinosa is half Spanish," Miss Russell explained, with her air of suppressed eagerness. "Spanish is her mother tongue!"

Mrs. Chatterton had closed her eyes. Lying back in her big pillows she looked, if pale and a little weary, extremely beautiful.

"See who that is knocking, Justine," she murmured.

"She hurt your head?" Miss Russell murmured concernedly, as a nod from the Frenchwoman sent one of the other maids to the door.

Juanita, satisfied that there was to be no hurry about all this, leaned back slightly in her chair and breathed more easily. It was a strain, to be sure, this meeting with the fabled mistress of the big mansion, but, after all, she was but a cog in Mrs. Chatterton's machine; however important to her, Juanita, it was a matter comparatively trifling to her em-

ployer who filled the post of secretary for a few quiet winter months in California.

"It was a message from Mr. Chatterton, madam," the maid said, returning from the door. "If madam would prefer a light supper, in his upstairs library, he would be glad to arrange it. Mr. Billy will dine with him and join madam later."

"One moment," said Mrs. Chatterton. And she pressed a beautiful ringed hand tight across her eyes. "Tell him," she said, after an interval in which there was absolute silence in the room, "that of course I'll come down, and he is to get whom he likes for bridge afterward." And still with closed eyes, as the maid turned away, she caught Justine's clever hand with her own white fingers, staying it. "Not just this moment," she murmured. "And put out that centre light, will you, Justine? What's—important that you have there, Anne?" she asked painfully.

Anne plunged into her letters. Invitations, club notices, messages, she flashed through them all, and Mrs. Chatterton, with whom the maids had quite finished now, lay with shut eyes, languidly directing her.

"We'll go to that. Say as prettily as you can that I can't manage it, will you, Anne? Send them a reasonable check, so that my name won't head the list."

Anne pencilled notes busily upon margins, and Juanita sat listening.

The beautiful room was lighted only by exquisitely modulated little lamps now; one glowed like an opal upon the wide, littered dressing table, one was just beyond Mrs. Chatterton's head, and lighted the lovely, immobile face, as she rested, with shut eyes, like a bit of rare marble.

The bed, like all the furniture here, was French, distempered painted wood, stencilled upon its yellow-green with roses and dull ribbons. It was a low bed, canopied, and trailing its exquisite laces and silks negligently upon the rich

rugs that covered the floor. Great puffed and gathered curtains of chameleon silks had been drawn against the inclement night; at the one window that was an eighth open the frilled white sash curtain stood stiffly horizontal. A wet wind was blowing Christmas in.

The air was warm and scented with flowers, powders, and perfumes. In the adjoining room, a sort of breakfast room and study for the lady of the house, a dozen banded trunks had been set; they were spilling the glories of the Arabian nights into the hands of the maids, who were rapidly and noiselessly coming and going, assorting and distributing their contents.

But in here there was a strange peace. Juanita had a homesick moment of memory: she thought of the old rancho, of the closed rooms smelling of damp and mice, of the beloved low roof where wet eucalyptus sickles and pepper tassels lay matted and forlorn, of the barn, scented and warm from the cows, of the creaking windmill, and above all of the sea—her sea, where the gray waves were running in, sliding—sliding out, churning, chuckling, bubbling, dragging the protesting pebbles with them, under the curving clean wings and the high, piping cries of the gulls.

"You should be doing this, Miss Espinosa," Miss Russell said, with a smile, and in a cautiously lowered tone, when for a few seconds there was a pause.

"I'd be glad to!" Juanita whispered back. But before she could reach for a pencil, Mrs. Chatterton's rich voice broke in.

"What's the name? Espinosa?"

"Yes, Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita answered, a little frightened, but maintaining her pretty, convent-bred manners.

The older woman was silent a moment. Then she said:

"How did you get hold of her, Anne?"

"She saw the advertisement in the *Argonaut*, Mrs. Chatterton. I had to advertise," Anne explained. "I tried through

the Spanish consul and the Mexican consul, but you never saw such funny, fusty old ladies as they sent me. Women who had never earned money before and felt themselves degraded by it."

"I know the type," the mistress interrupted, with a faint shudder, and lay still.

"About yourself, Miss Espinosa. You're a Californian?" she asked unexpectedly.

The colour came into Juanita's face and her eyes watered. But she answered steadily, if rather low:

"I was born on a ranch down in Monterey County. But my mother"—she cleared her throat—"my mother died about six weeks ago," she said.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" There was quick compunction and pity in the beautiful voice, and Mrs. Chatterton's tone was lowered in turn. "My head," she went on faintly, after a moment of silence, "is *splitting*." She sat up, put her slippered feet on the rug, and for a moment grasped her temple with both hands.

Anne was instantly all consternation.

"My *goodness*, you shouldn't have let me tire you! I'm so sorry. You're exhausted from the trip and all those people coming in! We'll go."

"Perhaps it would be better," the older woman consented, with a white-lipped smile. "Your name is Juanita Espinosa, then?" she asked, looking beyond Juanita, frowning slightly, and speaking as if through distracting pain.

"Yes, Mrs. Chatterton." Juanita, unobserved, gave Anne a puzzled and somewhat uneasy look.

"Anne, here—Miss Russell," Mrs. Chatterton said with difficulty, "will tell you that unfortunately—*unfortunately*—it is probably a question of my—my needing an—an older woman." She looked almost pleadingly at Anne's suddenly stricken face. "You—you can see that, Anne?" she asked.

"But, however, all that must wait! All that can wait!" she finished desperately. "We can make an arrangement in the morning. I've done too much. Good-night, Miss Espinosa. Anne—will you wait just a moment?"

Juanita, bewildered almost to the point of fright, slipped from the room. Mrs. Chatterton, when she was gone, lay back again and detained the other girl with a nervous grasp upon her fingers.

"Where did you get that girl, Anne?"

"Why—why, she's the girl who answered my advertisement in the *Argonaut*," Anne returned, astonished at her manner. "Are you ill? Mayn't I call Justine?"

"No. No. Leave me alone for a few minutes," Mrs. Chatterton said, with closed eyes.

"She is young," Anne admitted gently, "but she is a lovely girl—and she's had so much trouble! And she does speak beautiful Spanish—she was speaking it with one of the men working in the garden to-day, and you never *heard*——"

"She has a good friend in you, and that's in her favour," Mrs. Chatterton said, in almost her normal tone, as she opened her eyes. "She reminded me of someone I used to know—it shocked me for a second—and being extremely tired——"

"Well, of course!" Anne murmured.

"I loathe that train trip, you know. Always so filthy! And last night I hardly shut my eyes."

"Well, of *course!* It was all my fault for not thinking——"

"Not at all, my dear. You were, as always, an angel. Now, run along, and send Justine to me, and don't worry! I'll have a talk with little Miss Espinosa in the morning and we'll see."

"It's wonderful how you've gotten the name," Anne, departing, said with admiration. "I had a terrible time with

it. I used to call her Miss Valencia, and Miss Milflores and every other Spanish name you ever heard!"

She fancied Mrs. Chatterton did not hear her, for the woman lying impassive and with closed eyes on the luxurious chaise longue gave no sign as Anne quietly left the room and noiselessly closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHAT happened to my mother last night?" Billy Chatterton, lounging into Miss Russell's busy study the next morning, asked idly. "She was having fits in there—she was fainting, and crying, and everything!—I never saw her act that way in my life! My father went up, and they had the doctor over——"

"What happened," Miss Russell said, with a stricken look of responsibility, and pausing in her assortment of papers, "was that she was tired to death, and we all proceeded—in a way that I can't understand, now that I think of it—to tire her more. Poor darling, she'd had that hard, gritty, icy Overland trip, a lot of people to meet her in the city, a perfect mob here, somebody doing her hands and somebody washing her hair, the telephone ringing, I reading letters to her like a crazy woman—no wonder she collapsed. The doctor said that it was a sort of nervous hysteria."

"Nervous hysteria doesn't sound any more like her than senile dementia," Billy offered doubtfully, as she paused. "Don't look so anxious, Miss Espinosa," he added, smiling at Juanita's round, seriously staring eyes, "*you* didn't do it! What's this you are doing so busily on Christmas Eve?"

Juanita returned to her work with a little start.

"This is the most important list we have," she assured him, displaying neatly filled columns in a blank book. "These are the people your mother asks to dinners, and the ones without the stars are just for teas or receptions or big things."

"I see—hot sketch," Billy murmured approvingly. "But what are the ones with X in front of the name?"

"That X means 'Mr. and Mrs.' You know how to address them: husbands and wives," she said, laughing a little because he was laughing at her.

"I get you. But there's one—there's another, with the number mark, what's that? ♯Mrs. R. Webster Key. What does that mean? # Mr. Robert W. Key."

"That's 'divorced.' You have to be terribly careful about *them*," Juanita explained. "One name, you see, and two addresses—and sometimes they won't go to the same places!"

"Well," Billy commented, pleased, "it's quite a liberal education, isn't it? It must make you want to get into society."

"It's quite a job," Miss Russell interpolated, with a delicate and significant accent on the last word.

"Miss Russell means that she wants me to get out," Billy murmured confidentially to Juanita. "But don't ever let her know I suspected it! Poor Miss Russell, she's going to be a missionary, you know, and she hates to hurt people's feelings. I think she's awfully nice, don't you?" he added, in an ordinary conversational tone. "It seems that the idea is that when she gets to China she's going to begin by saying that she converted *me*. Seems there's been considerable speculation about it among the Chinese girls——"

"Now, listen, that will about *do* for you!" Miss Russell commented discouragingly. "What Chinese girls think about is none of your affair. And if there's going to be a list of these Christmas flowers kept——"

"Let me help," Billy suggested bustlingly. He drew out a chair, established himself opposite Juanita at the flat-top desk. He snatched up a second blank book. "'Sent,' he read, in a tone intended to drown out any protest from Anne Russell. "'To Mrs. Murray in hospital, with new baby. Roses, large basket, small basket baby roses. To Eliza Satterlee, engagement. String of crystals.' What's all this, for instance?" Billy asked.

"We have to keep lists of all the presents your mother gives or receives," Miss Russell explained. "While she's been away, her friends have been dying and having babies and marrying——"

"Just a *minute*," Billy Chatterton interrupted, with a pained frown, "you place those things in such a strange order, my dear young ladies! They've been dying, and then having babies——"

"And I," the secretary continued, with a reproving frown in her eyes but laughter twitching at the corners of her mouth, "I have had to send flowers, candy—that sort of thing. Your mother never makes a wedding or Christmas present without looking in this book to see what she sent last year or what *they* sent her. We very nearly sent the Hamilton girl silver service plates for her engagement, *and* for her wedding—and then actually spoke of them for Christmas. That would have been a *nice* thing to do!"

"She could have taken in boarders, with three dozen," Billy murmured, with a glance at Juanita. And by this time Juanita was so taken in herself, by his firm, rosy skin, and his blue eyes, and the crispness of his fluted, yellowish brown hair, and the glint of his white teeth, that she laughed at everything he said, indiscriminately.

He had been playing golf this morning; it was after twelve now. He wore well-cut knickerbockers and thick woollen stockings striped with scarlet and green, and he had worn a fine white wool sweater similarly striped. But this he had pulled off before settling officiously to his clerical labours. The shirt under it was of loose, soft white silk, soft-collared, and monogrammed heavily in black on the left sleeve.

Juanita had been quite captivated by him, handsome, friendly, and most amusing. But when Anne chanced to leave the room for a moment, she did not like him quite so well. He had immediately become what she characterized as silly.

"Mr. Chatterton, will you look through those cards you have there and see if one has 'Singleton' on it?" Juanita had said, absorbed in her work.

Supposing he had not heard her, she had looked up, surprised, a second later, to find him staring at her with a rather foolish smile quite obliterating the likable quality of his face.

"That Singleton girl is more worry to us than anyone else!" Juanita had said hastily, to say something.

"I'm thinking about *another* little girl," Billy had answered, with a significant grin.

It was so ridiculous, it was so obvious. that it quite took Juanita's breath away. She had tried to laugh, in a superior and maternal manner, had tried not to see that the boy, by sprawling on the table, had stretched over to put his hand on her own hand.

"Aw—I like you terribly," he had mumbled. "I think you're awfully cute!"

Juanita had been conscious of a quick emotion of shock and of distaste. She could hardly believe her eyes when, as suddenly as his expression and manner had altered, they had resumed their original quality. Anne's reëntrance had found him just what he had been before: amusing, boyish, interested.

The younger girl sat in her place for a few minutes, dazed and puzzled, wondering if the little scene had been only in her own imagination, a little offended, a little frightened, more than a little disappointed.

"Aw—I like you awfully—I think you're terribly cute!" Was that what he had said? How dared he say that? And with what a leering, ridiculous look, and in what a mumbling, foolish tone he had said it! Men thought girls liked that sort of stuff the instant they had an opportunity for it.

He was nice again, now. Juanita gave herself a sort of mental shake, dismissed the unpleasant memory. Billy was being delightfully grave over the card catalogue.

"My mother gives the Templeton girl a jade bowl for Christmas," he discovered, "and an old French screen when she gets married. And what does Lucy Templeton come through with?—flowers. I call it cheesy. Mother was gypped!" Billy protested.

"Your mother stayed a week on the Templeton yacht at Monterey," Anne Russell explained anxiously, looking up. "And if you look there, you'll see that Mrs. Templeton's sister, Mrs. Brainerd, brought your mother a wonderful shawl from Valladolid."

"Ah, well, that's more like it," Billy agreed, appeased. "If Mother got a week's free board, and a shawl, with the flowers thrown in, then that's all velvet. But who's this guy who gave my mother a set of Ruskin in full calf? Whoever bound Ruskin in full calf had a sense of values, anyway. Protective colouring, eh what, Miss Espinosa?"

"*Really*," Anne Russell began patiently but firmly, "I expect your mother to send for me, and possibly Miss Espinosa, any minute—if she's rested enough, and I cannot—I cannot have you fooling away our time! Suppose you go see if your mother wants me before luncheon?"

"Miss Russell—you're so resourceful," Billy said admiringly. "Leave it to you to find busy work for idle hands! What do you think of her plan for traffic relief, Miss Espinosa?"

"I think—well of it," Juanita said hesitatingly, with her cheek dimpling.

"You think well of it. I wish I *could* get away from my desk," Billy complained, sighing. "I'm buried in work. Have we entered the little holly wreaths from old Mrs. Babcock? Write it. Holly wreaths, Mrs. Roger Babcock. Value, twenty cents. She had her man make them, I'll bet. That's what he was doing the afternoon it rained. All right, all right, quit shovin'," he protested, as Anne Russell opened the door and returned to place a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Mother's Spanish teacher comes this morning, so probably she'll want Miss Espinosa," he called back, retreating. "I may have to study Spanish. I've got to specialize in some Latin language——"

His joyous accents died away as a door closed in the hall. Juanita worked on busily, with an odd happiness in her heart.

"He's a wonder," Anne Russell commented on Billy, as the girls went down to their own little lunch room for their luncheon. "He's the most popular fellow in college, they say."

Juanita assented. He must be tremendously popular, naturally. But she did not like the last remark. It troubled her happy mood; made the gray, quiet day seem actually dull.

Anne Russell was summoned to Mrs. Chatterton's room at about three o'clock. She came back an hour later somewhat grave: Juanita felt vaguely that something unpleasant had happened, that something was amiss.

"Did she ask about me, about my Spanish?" the younger girl asked.

"Y-yes. It seems that there is some question about their going abroad again, and she spoke of having someone else in mind," Anne answered, in a troubled tone. "Well!" she said more briskly, as if shaking off a worried mood, "if it isn't one position, it's another, my dear! Sometimes the most interesting start in by being dull!"

Juanita felt apprehensive and oddly humiliated. Hadn't Mrs. Chatterton liked her, after all? Wasn't there to be Spanish conversation? Miss Russell, at least, said nothing now of a meeting between Mrs. Chatterton and Juanita, and to the younger girl, feeling her heart beat painfully with the hope of holding this position, of being given at least an opportunity to hold it, it was maddening to know that her fate might all be decided behind closed doors and herself dis-

missed without ever another glimpse of the magnificently exacting lady of the manor.

"Did she speak of me at all, Miss Russell?" Juanita asked anxiously.

"Well, yes, in a way. I think she thinks you are pretty young. But what she seemed doubtful about was whether her own plans mightn't change. A characteristic of rich people is," Anne added philosophically, "that their plans change all the time!"

Juanita felt bitterly discouraged. There were other jobs, there was other work in the world, but she could not think of them to-day. She had been thinking how she would improve upon Miss Russell's idea of a secretaryship, thinking of various little touches she would add to the work. She wrote a prettier, neater hand than Miss Russell, and then, of course, there was the Spanish.

Now, quite arbitrarily and autocratically, all her dreams were laid in dust. Without really knowing anything about what she could or couldn't do, Mrs. Chatterton was going to discharge her! On Christmas Eve, too—and her mother was dead—she was all alone——

She was making out a most pitiful case for herself, standing at a window in the early afternoon twilight, looking down upon the side garden, and a strip of the house where the lamplight shone warmly through rich curtains and upon holly wreaths, when she was summoned to the big library.

This was so unexpected that Juanita surprisedly interrogated the maid who brought the message. Who wanted her?

"Mr. Chatterton, if you please."

"Mr. Chatterton?" Juanita murmured, turning interrogative eyes to Anne Russell.

"Cribbage, maybe," Anne, delighted that her rather drooping little companion should be employed, should be impressed into service in any way, answered interestedly.

"Yes'm, that's it, miss," said the maid. "He ast for Mrs. Chatterton, but Justine says she wasn't to be disturbed, and then he says, 'Ast Miss Espinosa will she kinely step down to the liberry.'"

"Oh ——?" Juanita was gratified by any summons. Only not to be dismissed without a chance! She washed her face, the fresh velvet skin and the apricot cheeks emerging with all the softness of a baby's skin from the cold water, brushed the flyaway gold drift of her bright hair, settled the demure little cuffs that were part of her old convent uniform, and descended from the plain, small rooms she and Anne occupied ro the door into the perfumed and spacious upper hall, and so down the wide curving stairway, to find her old opponent all ready for her in the library.

Billy was out, he explained, and Mrs. Chatterton was naturally still feeling the fatigue of her trip. Juanita said nothing. She shuffled, cut, got the deal, pegged gravely. The room was beautiful, gray Christmas Eve outside, firelight and lamplight inside, luxurious smells, rich soft colours, shining surfaces. She thought, sedately counting fifteen-six and a double run, that she liked the atmosphere of rich houses; that pleasant heady mixture of soft odours. Violets and freesia lilies scented this house this afternoon, cleanness and airiness and wood fires and cigarettes.

"There is just one card in that pack—and if I could turn it——" Carwood Chatterton said, in measured tones. "By Jove, there it is—the five of hearts!" he added, triumphantly. Looking beyond Juanita, he immediately laid his cards face downward on the table and made an elaborate stiff gesture of leaving his chair. "Feeling better? Feeling rested?" he asked.

"Don't move," said a rich, exquisite voice behind her, and Juanita's heart jumped with something like panic. Immediately Mrs. Chatterton passed her, and with a gesture that kept her old husband in his chair, sank into another,

opposite him, and, resting her beautiful head against the high back, spread her two arms on the chair arms and gazed at the fire. "Don't disturb your game," she said, in an indifferent, kindly tone. And so negligently did she keep her weary, graceful pose and her averted gaze that the murmur of pegging, fifteen-two, and two for his nibs, did indeed continue unabated.

Carwood Chatterton was a slow player; every discard, every play was made with deep relish. His were all the trite little phrases and mannerisms of the old game; it was a never-ending joke to him to say "nineteen," when he had nothing to score, nineteen being a number impossible to count in cribbage points. And to the turned card he frequently said: "Who picked *you* before you were ripe?"

In his periods of thought, as he frowned at his cards and drew one fine, aristocratic hand slowly back and forth on the green table top, Juanita had time to study the beautiful picture presented by her new mistress. Jane Chatterton half lay, half sat, in her high-backed chair, her face in shadow, the orange glow of the great lamp behind her head throwing a mahogany light upon the exquisitely ordered scallops and curves of her rich dark hair. She wore a loose robe of some soft veiling, like a velvet chiffon, or a crêpe, a gown that blended from peacock-blue to peacock-green, and that had shifting lights in it, like a deep sea pool. It was belted with brilliants, and the flying sleeve, like that of a medieval abbess, was caught at the thin wrist with a string of them.

She was not a tall woman, although perhaps a little above the average in height and possessing a beautiful figure. Her skin had the fresh healthy radiance of a brunette, cheeks touched with carmine, full scarlet lips, and bright, clear, beautiful brown eyes. Yes, Juanita mused, watching her, there was no question of her beauty. It must have been one of her definite assets all her life, in any light, in any mood, in any gown. Whether she sat bare-shouldered and bare-

headed in the gloom of an opera box, or in a bathing suit walked boldly and unafraid on the Florida sands, she was always "the beautiful Mrs. Chatterton."

She wore on her slender right hand to-day a great sapphire ring, a rounded stone, framed in diamonds. Once or twice Juanita saw her stretch this fine hand toward the fire, as if she liked the play of light on the jewels, and once or twice she roused herself and looked thoughtfully at the cribbage players for a few seconds.

Forty-two, at least, Juanita thought, adding Billy's twenty-one years to her probable age at an early marriage. She admitted to forty; Anne Russell spoke of her as forty. Most of Mrs. Chatterton's friends, the wonderfully gowned, wonderfully groomed women who had been coming to the house to inquire about her return, were in her position, alluding lightly to themselves as "forty," but with big sons already getting out of college. It was tacitly admitted that most of them had married at seventeen, had a baby immediately.

Every point of Jane Chatterton's extraordinary natural beauty had been guarded like a jewel. Her skin was perfection, her hair brushed into lustre and softness, her colour, her lips, her straight thick eyebrows, her lashes, all subtly encouraged. Health, intelligence, keenness did the rest. Juanita, at this second glimpse of her, was quite ready to subscribe to the general opinion: she was unique. There was a discernible force, a resolution, a courage and determination about her, even as she sat here idly, watching the jewels flash on her white hand, resting beside the library fire, in her draperies of green and blue.

She seemed to alter the atmosphere of the whole house; it had a heart now, a centre toward which everything that happened had immediate reference.

"Feeling better?" the old man said, in an interval between hands. She stirred, raised her eyes, smiled.

"Oh, quite myself—and very much ashamed!" said the

haunting voice, that made all other voices, Juanita decided, sound so hasty, reedy, raw. Mrs. Chatterton's voice was rich, her tones rounded and deliberate, the words were like globes, somehow, globes of pure music.

"You look better now than you did when I went in to see you this morning," said her husband approvingly. "You lead," he said to Juanita.

"I wonder"—Mrs. Chatterton said presently, coming to look over Juanita's shoulder, always with her air of kindly, weary negligence—"I wonder if I could learn that game? It's always been such a mystery to me. How did *you* happen to learn it, Miss Espinosa?"

Juanita, she did not know why, was trembling. All the world seemed to her to be narrowed into this one room, all the purposes of her life reduced to this one, of pleasing Mrs. Chatterton.

"My mother played it," she said. Her voice failed her, and she had to clear her throat and repeat the little phrase. "My mother was a sort of invalid—we lived alone on an old rancho down in Monterey County," added Juanita. "We played almost every night."

"I see," the other woman said. She had returned to her chair, her face was turned away, and shielded besides by the slender fingers upon which she rested her cheek. "You told me," she murmured, in a gentle tone, and staring into the fire, "that you had lost her."

Juanita did not dare reply. She could not trust herself to say anything of the Señora; she dared make no bid for Mrs. Chatterton's further interest. She played her cards, and, after a second, the other woman turned once more to give her a keen glance, and turned back to the fire.

For half an hour the cribbage game proceeded, and Jane Chatterton, dreaming, hardly moved or spoke. Then the old man, delighted with a hard-won game, expressed himself as obliged to go upstairs and change to evening wear, rang

for a man, and sent away cards and table. Juanita, packing the little red and white spokes in their box, was oddly frightened, oddly glad to have the silent woman by the fire suddenly address her.

"Miss Espinosa."

"Yes, Mrs. Chatterton?"

"Will you stay for a few moments? I want to speak to you."

"Certainly." Now it was coming, Juanita thought, with a dry mouth and heavy heart. Now she would be dismissed.

"Sit down," the older woman directed her, when they were alone. Her careless nod indicated a chair on the other side of the fireplace, a big, hard, straight-backed chair, whose curves and oaken scrolls were high above Juanita's fair head; a chair so big that her feet were quite lifted from the ground when she sat in it, and she felt like a little girl up for a scolding.

"Miss Espinosa," Mrs. Chatterton said thoughtfully, unhurriedly, after a meditative glance at Juanita, and a return of her attention to the fire, "my excellent little secretary, Miss Russell, has rather overstepped her authority while I've been away, and has placed me in an awkward position. I didn't know you were down here to-day, so kindly amusing Mr. Chatterton," said Jane, narrowing her eyes as she looked at her ring, "but I meant to send for you, to ask you to come in and see me, when it was convenient, so that perhaps this opportunity"—she raised her eyes and smiled—"will do as well as that?" she concluded, on a friendly and interrogative note.

Juanita perceived that graciousness was one of her many charming affectations. She really was, perhaps, a considerate and kindly woman, but many considerate and kindly women could not make so pretty a business of it as she did. With maids, butlers, and, as Juanita was later to learn, with manicures, elevator boys, conductors, and porters, it was

always the same. She could win their fealty and their adoration with one smile, one glance, one word. And she was never above winning it.

"If I had been here," she said, slowly and mildly, "a word to Anne would have cleared the whole thing. I wasn't here. And now, since I can't reproach Anne, who is so happy and excited over her trip to China and her missionary that she doesn't know *what* she's doing, I think perhaps you and I will have to enter into a little conspiracy to save her feelings?"

She ended on her characteristic interrogation; that deferential little air of questioning that placed the responsibility so pleasantly with the listener.

Juanita, to her own consternation, discovered herself to be on the brink of tears. They were thick in her throat, they were pressing like a pain behind her eyes, they were making the muscles under her ears hurt. Not to cry, like a big, helpless baby—she prayed wildly—just not to cry—just not to cry——

She gulped, nodded, smiled through dazzled eyes.

"I do need Spanish, and of course I shall need a secretary," Mrs. Chatterton was saying. "But—most unfortunately, I found, when I was in Washington, just the very girl I have been manœuvring for, for more than a year—Miss Peters. She's had nine years of experience there. It was just before I left—stupidly, I didn't telegraph Anne, as I should have done." She paused.

"Why, that's all right," Juanita faltered bravely.

"Of course it is," Mrs. Chatterton echoed, approving her courage. "These things straighten themselves out always. Only, I'm sorry, for with all due respect to Miss—Miss Peters, I don't think much of her Spanish. However, this is my idea, now. We'll let things go on as they are, for a day or two, until Anne sails. That is on the twenty-sixth?"

"Not until the twenty-ninth now. There's been a delay," Juanita supplied. She was surprised at the flicker of concern

that went like the presage of a storm across the other woman's clear brown eyes.

"Not until the twenty-ninth? Ah, I see." And she fell silent, pondering. "Well!" she said presently, in a brisk tone, "that's that, then. The twenty-ninth. Now, you'll be surprised to hear, Miss Espinosa," she continued, "that this morning I telephoned to a very good friend of mine, Mrs. Harrison, about you."

"About *me?*"

"About you. Mrs. Harrison is manager of the Saint Monica Club, a delightful hotel it is, really, for girls, in San Francisco. Every room is pretty, and sunny, and has a bath; indeed, girls fight like tiger-cats to get in there—there's a waiting list a yard long. I'm on their Board of Directors. I want you to be my guest there," Jane Chatterton finished very simply and kindly, "until you are placed in some position you really like. We'll let Anne Russell get off, we'll say nothing to her about it, and then I'll send you in. And I know you'll love Mrs. Harrison, and she'll love you!"

"But, Mrs. Chatterton, I can't let you make yourself responsible for me—it's too much to expect," Juanita began proudly and youthfully. The other woman was apparently paying no attention to her, although she was watching her with speculative, absent eyes.

"What are your prospects, Miss Espinosa? You were left practically alone?"

"Quite alone. I've no relatives at all."

"And no money?"

"Well, just a little. Enough for an emergency."

"I see. This ranch, then, where you were brought up, didn't belong to your mother? It was mortgaged?"

"No. But by some family arrangement it was left to cousins of my father."

"I see." Jane Chatterton paused. Then she said, with

an air of irrelevance, "I was a working girl myself, you know, before I married Mr. Chatterton."

This was nice of her, friendly, Juanita thought, and deliberately intended to be friendly, to win Juanita's liking. Not but what she knew it, suspected it anyway. But it was characteristically considerate of Mrs. Chatterton, in this hard talk, to lessen the barriers between them.

"I know exactly what your problems are," Mrs. Chatterton resumed, "and what the pleasure and excitement of feeling one's self independent is. And that's why I want you to let me be your *marraine*—your godmother," she corrected herself, "until you get on your feet. I assure you," she added, as Juanita flushed a little, and looked down, and was still, "I assure you that the women I know are doing this sort of thing all the time, partly to encourage the clubs, and partly—partly," she said, smiling, "because girls need so very little of a push, nowadays, to find themselves. There's such a splendid field before them."

"You're very kind, Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita said, still somewhat doubtful and in a low voice.

"I'm not kind at all!" the other answered cheerfully, in evident relief. "I'm doing exactly what I want to do, which always puts me in a good humour. Now, for the present, this being Christmas Eve, we'll not say anything to anybody. Mrs. Harrison tells me she won't have an inch at the Saint Monica Club until after Christmas. Then she's to telephone me, and when I hear from her I'll send for you—unless we have a chance for some Spanish in the meanwhile, which doesn't seem likely over the holidays, does it?"

"When—when do you expect Miss Peters?" Juanita, merely to show a good sporting spirit, asked a little timidly.

"Miss Peters?" the other woman asked in her turn.

"Your new secretary," elucidated Juanita, a little surprised at her vagueness.

"Oh—oh, yes. Miss Peters, of course. Why, she's coming early in the new year—perhaps before that. I'm expecting a wire almost any day," Mrs. Chatterton responded. "I do feel most grateful to you," she added kindly, as Juanita stood up, feeling a little blank and lonely, appreciating that the conversation was ended, and ready to go. "I do feel grateful to you for making this so easy for me and for Anne. The situation isn't of my making, and I have to—hurt somebody," she said, with a winning smile on the face she dropped just a little sideways, as if to appeal to Juanita. "I'm sorry it's you."

"I appreciate your kindness to me, too, Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita said awkwardly, because she was deeply touched.

"Not at all, it isn't anything." They were both standing now, and Jane Chatterton, who was the taller of the two, bent a little to take both of Juanita's hands in her own, and smiled down at her. Her face, Juanita thought, still showed the signs of yesterday's fatigue and collapse, still was pale. "And whatever happens, you aren't to worry, my dear," Jane said. "You're to remember that I'm your friend. There are too many uses for nice girls nowadays to have any one of them so silly as to worry!"

With the last word, Juanita felt herself dismissed from the library, and knew herself dismissed from her first position as well. But, somehow, the personality of the woman with whom she had just been talking dwarfed every other consideration. Juanita felt excited, oddly elated, she felt her heart welling with pure, unreasonable adoration of this superbly adequate woman, she found herself trying to remember what she had said—Mrs. Chatterton's words, her tones, were all clearly graven in her memory. No danger of forgetting them!

No question, either, that whether she continued to employ her or sent her away, the mistress of the house liked Juanita.

She had not talked to her perfunctorily, she had been putting every ounce of her personality into that dismissal; it had not been easy, matter-of-fact, to her. And that Juanita found heartening, found thrilling. Mere contact with her made other relationships pale; whether one liked her or didn't like her, one wanted most absorbingly to matter to her, to signify something—anything!—in her gracious, negligent, magnificent life.

"You're to remember that I'm your friend!" How sweetly, how simply she had said that. Did most society women, flattered, courted, constantly in demand, find time to say that so charmingly to the least, the most recent of their employees?

Juanita couldn't—in spite of her most deliberate efforts to do so—feel discouraged or feel blue. It was Christmas Eve, there was cold, clear, furry moonlight out of doors, everything—trees, shrubbery, spreading oak trees—took on an unearthly beauty in the cold, clear light.

Juanita, lingering at a window in the dark, back upper hallway, on her way upstairs, amused herself with the fancy that so might the first Christmas night have looked, two thousand years ago. She did not think of the ranch to-night, the first Christmas night in her life that she had spent away from it.

No, she thought with a little appreciative shiver of the warmth and safety, of the fascination of the big house behind her, its softly carpeted, softly lighted rooms, its spaces and shadows and mellowed colours and draperies. It was good to be even the humblest and least considered member of the Chatterton household, on this bustling, evergreen-scented, violet-scented vigil of Christmas. There was a sheer animal comfort, a prosperity and bigness about everything here, that satisfied her. To play cribbage with the old man, to have one's own insignificant problems considerately and generously pondered by the beautiful mistress of the house,

to be stopped here for a word with Billy, there for a friendly chat with Kent, to have gentle, conscientious Anne as a companion and confidante—all this, at Juanita's age, spelled happiness, and despite all the uncertainty and change ahead, she was happy to-night.

CHAPTER IX

TO MAKE the evening quite perfect, Kent surprised Anne and herself by inviting himself to their little dinner table: an honour he had not done them before.

The Chattertons were dining out, Billy was going to a dinner party and two dances. Kent apparently made the arrangements himself, the little table in the plain dining room that looked out on the side of the house and the laurels was candlelighted, and they duly had a small turkey and a mince pie.

He was rather quiet but seemed happy; Juanita thought that at no time before had she seen so rested, so contented a look in his eyes. He carved for them, and Anne Russell, although somewhat inclined to the consideration of what all this food would mean to the poor Chinese of the flood zone, seemed happy, too. Juanita was deeply satisfied. She wore her one good dress, of black taffeta, with scalloped lace collar and cuffs, and the candlelight got tangled in her shining eyes, and the rose-bloom glowed on her cheeks, and gold shone in her soft drift of hair.

After the meal, they sat talking for a good hour, playing with nuts and raisins and candies, and then Kent asked the girls if they were going to church in the morning, and both said yes. Anne at eleven, Juanita before breakfast.

"Who drives you?" he said to Juanita. She explained that she wouldn't think of asking any of the men; she liked the walk. "I see," he said reflectively.

And, the next morning, before dawn, in the cold, heavy dark, he joined her at the side door when she came out, rosy with

sleep and shaking in the cold air. He gave her no explanation, even his "Merry Christmas" was brief and dry, but he put his firm fingers under her elbow at the crossings and stretched a thickly gloved hand to her when they came to puddles.

Silently, he walked beside her, past dark, cold gardens, toward the east where the black curtain was showing folds of forbidding gray. There was frost under their feet; muffled women, hunching their shoulders, came out of gates and fled before them in the gloom.

Kent stooped his big, bared head, as he followed her into the warm, pine-scented little church, where, in the pleasant dimness of a few far-scattered lights, cloaked women were leaning umbrellas against the pew backs, and the thin strains of the "Adeste" were wheezing through the air. When Juanita knelt, Kent slid to one knee, when she stood he stood, always respectfully, yet impersonally studying the scene about him, and listening to a rather forlorn sermon as if absorbed.

On the way home, he told her of a Christmas morning when his brother and he had attempted to get a pair of young turkey buzzards for his mother, and of a bitten cheek, torn new clothes, and the final installation of two ferocious and half-grown birds in an old chicken pen. He did not laugh as he recounted it, but Juanita did, a joyous sound that mingled with the shy "Merry Christmas" of passers-by, and the brightness of the rising sun on frosty grass and dooryard paths.

It reminded her of a gull she had found, she said, a weakling baby, flopping over the unfriendly rocks, and of the months when this gull was her companion and her delight. But when he had gone back to the flock, full-grown and strong, she had never been able to identify him again.

"I rather thought," she said gaily, walking with all the exhilaration of the early winter riser whose every step is

nearing coffee and warmth, "I rather thought he might always remember and fly to me, but he never did. My lamb did—the lamb I had when I was quite small; she used to butt me over, when she grew to be a sheep. And the dogs——"

A wistful note came into her voice, when memory brought to her the shaggy, affectionate half-breed collies and setters that swarmed on the rancho. Kent, when they reached the big house that was still wrapped in sleep, except for a quietly fuming chimney here and there, asked her if she were happy.

"Yes—" she answered hesitatingly—"interested," she added. "Like somebody else—like somebody whose life I am reading. I can't help thinking that Mother will call me home, some day, ask for an explanation of it all. I can't quite believe I'm responsible to nobody."

Kent, after a moment's hesitation, asked her if she liked young Billy, and with a quick significant look into his eyes she answered that she did. Didn't Kent?

Yes, he said he did. He added somewhat irrelevantly that life was pretty easy for such a kid, and after a moment of silence they smiled at each other, said another "Merry Christmas," and Juanita went in to her breakfast upstairs. But she thought of the little conversation again when Billy, coming in to find her alone in Anne Russell's study in mid-morning, presented her shyly with a present, a little pin of turquoise daisies, in a circle, not valuable in itself, but he said it had belonged to his grandmother.

Juanita, who had been listing the cards from Mrs. Chatterton's flowers and gifts, stood with it in her hand, her heart beating a little quicker, a puzzled smile on her face. Sunshine was streaming in between the white ruffled muslin and the gay chintz curtains, and the wood fire made the bright air deliciously warm.

"I can't—very well, take this, you know," she stammered, terribly embarrassed.

"Why not?" Billy demanded, turning red.

"Because I like you friendly, and I hate you mushy!" Juanita, disliking the smile that had come into his young, foolish face, wanted to answer honestly. But she did not dare. She stood holding the little box in her hand, awkward, undecided, uncomfortable.

"Don't know you well enough to give you that, hey?" Billy presently said, taking the box, and jamming it carelessly into his pocket. And he came close to her side, and bent to murmur in her ear: "When will I know you well enough, Juanita? Huh? When will I know you well enough —you cunning——"

Well, most girls liked that sort of thing, of course! They were dancing, and eating, and taking long motor rides to the tune of it all night long and through half the day. The murmured phrases of courting nowadays were inane stuff, perhaps love-making always was sickening—if one were not in the mood for it.

She raised her eyes to his.

"You know you mustn't do this—*really*," she said, smiling but distressed. "Really—I can't stay here unless——"

He instantly became sensible, the amorous expression she hated left his face, he straightened himself, almost visibly shook himself into the finer mood.

"I know—I know—I'm a fool!" he said penitently and hastily. "But, listen—I'll behave. What are you doing? What can I do?"

He wanted to stay and help her. Anne Russell had gone to church. Juanita explained that it was a holiday and that, as soon as she finished these gift cards, listing them neatly for notes of thanks on the morrow, she would be free. Or no, then she had to make a plan for the dinner party New Year's Eve, fifty persons, and his mother wanted to be sure that they were seated intelligently.

"Well, all right, you go on with your notes—I'll help with

this," he said agreeably. He drew a great ring for the round table, and began to pencil the names lightly around it, like rays. Juanita felt that this was a trifle irregular, certainly the son of the house shouldn't be up here arranging dinner places with his mother's under-secretary on Christmas Day. But he was so handsome, so cheerful and amusing, so friendly, that she admitted in her heart that it was delightful to be in his company.

"Doc Ross, I'll put him next to Mrs. Hunter," he said, chewing his pencil.

"You know better than I who are friends," Juanita agreed gratefully. The boy laughed shamefacedly.

"She's his first wife! At that, they might like to get together and chew the rag about the dear old days," Billy reflected. "No, now, honestly—I'll do it all right!" he protested, in alarm, as Juanita looked her honest horror and stretched her hand for the list. And almost immediately, to her profound uneasiness, he came to her side of the table, sat on it so that his face was just above hers, caught her busy hand, and asked, with a little laugh:

"Little girl, do you like me? You haven't any idea how I like you!"

Juanita, frightened, stood up and found herself close to him, his arm lightly about her shoulders, the odour of shaving soap and fine linen and Scotch tweeds very near. Her breast moved up and down, she shut her teeth and felt her breath come and go in her nostrils, looked up, looked down again.

"Don't be scared," he said, laughing, "I tell you I'm crazy about you! Just crazy about you."

"Oh, but you mustn't," Juanita murmured, praying for Miss Russell's return. She hated him. She hated him!

"Oh, but why mustn't I?" he whispered. He drew her toward him; his lips brushed her hair.

Juanita broke free, fled blindly. She went into the next room, which was Miss Russell's, through the hall beyond,

into her own, and shut the door. She stood panting, eyeing the knob. If he followed her—what would she do?

But he did not. The peaceful Sunday morning calm remained unbroken. Radiators clanked gently; the air was soft and warm. Where was he? What was he doing?

A knock on the door brought her heart into her mouth. But it was Miss Russell, announcing luncheon. Juanita admitted her, brushed her hair, followed her down to the meal, her heart still beating fast.

But after awhile she grew a little proud of the whole episode, with the inconsistency of girlhood. She would not have invited it for anything in the world. But it had been thrilling. His arms, his flush, his stammered assurance that he liked her. Silly as was his fashion of making love, still, it was love-making, the only sort he knew. No, by three o'clock, when Billy and three other young persons were shouting over the billiard table, Juanita realized that she would not have been without those exciting few minutes for anything in the world.

They had nothing to do with anything that had gone before; they could have nothing to do with anything that could come after. But how thrilling they had been!

Miss Russell asked her, as a favour, to go down at five o'clock and ask Mrs. Chatterton if she would speak to Lady Blakely on the telephone. Juanita, demure in black, but with the creamy collar and cuffs of old Spanish lace transforming the plain gown, went obligingly down.

Mrs. Chatterton, with her husband and two friends, was playing bridge. Certainly she would speak to Lady Blakely. Juanita knew her well enough, now, to know that she would always be glad to speak to anyone named Lady Blakely. Juanita herself was returning upstairs when Billy came flying out of some downstairs room, apparently, astonishing as it seemed, for no more important purpose than to speak to her.

He walked upstairs beside her, his handsome head dropped, his face radiant. What was she doing? Helping Miss Russell, huh? Juanita asked pointedly what *he* was? Oh, just loafing with some people in the billiard room.

"This is my door," she said, in the upper hallway. She raised her softly blown bright head, raised her soft, black-lashed blue eyes. He stood looking at her.

"I am terribly sorry about this morning," he offered, with an incoherent effect due to nervous laughter.

Juanita's eyes lighted. In the strange excitement that any contact with Mrs. Chatterton gave her, she had all but forgotten this morning. Now she said faintly:

"Oh—that's all right."

"But will you forgive me, Juanita?" he said.

"Why, certainly," she answered, confused.

"Well, call me Billy, then!" He was flushed, laughing, he was being foolish again.

"Oh, Billy, but I don't think I ought to do that!" she said innocently, startled. And they both laughed, Juanita flushing scarlet, Billy noisy with delight.

Then she disappeared through the doorway that led to her own regions, and he went downstairs again. Juanita walked slowly, pondering. She was nearly twenty-four, he twenty-one. She was less than nobody, he was the heir to a name and a fortune. Yet—yet, if he was merely playing, he was deeper than he seemed, more cruel than he seemed.

"Mrs. Chatterton," she mused, "would send me flying *to-morrow* if there was anything like *that!*"

For she knew already, educated by everything in the house, by every letter, every message, every servant, and confirmed in her judgment by every glimpse she had of her new mistress, that Mrs. Chatterton was a woman who, for all the years of her life, had known what she wanted and known how to get it.

Just at present, and perhaps for the past decade, she had

wanted to be a great lady. She hadn't been born that, Juanita instinctively knew. She was everything else, but she was not a gentlewoman by birth.

The cool, clean blood of New England, the courage and chivalry of the pioneers, these were not in her, whatever they were worth. Behind the men of her house there were no old universities clad in ivy, no Pembroke chairs and sampler alphabets, no diaries peppered with America's great names. But she wore the lion's skin boldly, Juanita thought, and perhaps she would never meet the real lion; perhaps there were no real lions!

Society seemed composed of the real thing fading into poverty, oblivion, extinction, and the imitation doing better than the real ever did. Where was there a woman more aristocratically sure of herself in every way than this one?

Not easily found. At all events, all citadels had gone down before Jane Chatterton. Her lovely head, beneath the three magic plumes, had bowed gracefully before a crowned queen; she could speak of her own impressions of the boyish charms of an heir apparent, studied across a luncheon table; the courts, the embassies of the world were by no means unfamiliar playground to her. Her French was almost perfection; Juanita thought the common words, "tulle" and "menu," new, when she heard Mrs. Chatterton pronounce them. She spoke Italian, German, after a fashion, she played the piano, and knew everything good in the modern operas, the new composers; she kept in touch with books, reviews, plays, personalities; she could chatter intelligently of politics. Jane Chatterton could be beautifully, negligently bored when other women were speechless with excitement; she could snub; she could bide her time.

Society, and knowing the right people, was with her at once a game, a religion, and an occupation. Now she was becoming diplomatically ambitious; Juanita was astonished at the progress she made in Spanish in the course of only a few

crowded days. Apparently, she kept a book near her, dipped into it a dozen times a day, absorbed it through her very skin. And it was characteristic of her that she used daringly every word she learned.

Juanita fancied that this woman could be cruel, could be ruthless, when it served her end. She would let nothing stand between her and her desire. But when severity gained no purpose, she was always sweet, and those who had ever merited her anger were careful, the girl imagined, not to risk it again.

Two days before New Year's, when Miss Russell had actually sailed for the Orient and her minister, Billy asked abruptly if she were going away.

The girl coloured brightly and answered yes, she said she did not know quite when.

"Who told you, Billy?" she asked.

"I heard my mother and father talking of it. She said something about your giving up the job. What for?" Billy demanded flatly.

"Why, it seems that your mother has engaged another secretary, from Washington," Juanita told him cheerfully.

"Well, that isn't what she told my father," Billy protested, his face flushed and annoyed and his eyes reading Juanita's face suspiciously. "In the first place, I had no business to hear, but that wasn't my fault!" he went on. "I was lying in the library with my feet up—anybody could have seen me! My mother and father walked through—the windows were open this morning, and I heard Mother say: 'If she wants to go, I can't keep her.' And my father asked if it was more money, and she said no, and then he said he was sorry—that you played such a good game of cribbage—that's how I knew it was you! And Mother said, 'I'm sorry, too. But she positively won't stay.'"

"I don't understand that," Juanita said, trying to speak lightly, but cut to the heart. Evidently, Mrs. Chatterton

just simply disliked her; that was all. She stood biting her lip, confused and distressed.

"Listen," Billy suggested suddenly, after a pause in which he had obviously been entertaining the thought of violent measures. "You don't want to go. Juanita—what do you want to go for? Will you let me ask her right out if there isn't a misunderstanding?"

"Oh, no—you couldn't do that!" Juanita exclaimed, in an agony. "Oh, *please*——"

"Well, listen—tell me this——" Billy stammered eagerly, ineloquent but tremendously in earnest. "If I fix it, will you stay? Listen, if you go, where are you going? Tell me that."

She looked at him dubiously, speculatively.

"Aw, say, come now," he pleaded boyishly, "why couldn't I know that? Is it—" his face suddenly changed—"your going hasn't got anything to do with me?" he asked.

"Oh, no—*no!*" she assured him, worried and yet laughing. And quite simply and sensibly she added, "I see no reason why you shouldn't know where I'm going, although I'll have to find another job immediately and won't be there long. I'll be at the Saint Monica Club; it's a sort of girls' hotel, and your mother has most kindly made arrangements for me there."

"Since when was this?" he asked blankly.

"Oh, since she came back—almost the first day."

He stared at her reproachfully.

"And you never told me!"

To this Juanita made no response. But the championship was sweet to her, nevertheless, and she raised to him shining eyes that were misted with tears.

For a moment they stood so, silent, and she discovered that Billy was holding her hand, rubbing it with his thumb, back and forth, his distressed eyes reading hers. Then he asked abruptly:

"What can I do? Gee, I hate to have you go away!"

And Juanita answered soberly, sympathetically:

"I don't see that you can do anything without making things harder all round!"

He shook his head, gritted a childish, impatient "Gosh!" between his teeth, and, turning sharply, walked away. And Juanita, trembling a little, touched more than a little, went on with her morning work. She had expected her banishment, but the days since Mrs. Chatterton's return had been full and happy ones, the excitement of seeing Anne Russell off distracting, and now she was deeply interested in the plans for the big New Year's dinner; her workroom was full of horns and confetti and cowbells and elaborate tissue caps; she was absorbed in the delight of hospitality on a big scale and the satisfaction of having a finger in it.

There was a blankness, a real disappointment in the discovery that the inexorable mistress of the house had not changed her plans by one iota, that she had not been won or softened by Juanita's eagerness and willingness and efficiency. No new secretary had come; Juanita had heard nothing of preparations for Miss Peters's arrival. Personally, the girl mused, it was hard to see how Mrs. Chatterton could manage the big dinner at all, on New Year's Eve, without any secretary to answer the telephone, and act as a buffer between the mistress of the house and the problems that were sure to arise.

Billy's revelations had awakened Juanita to the fact that she had been secretly hoping to be kept, secretly confident, indeed, that she would be. Now, when he was gone, a blankness and depression fell upon her spirits, and she wished the whole thing over, wished that Mrs. Chatterton would send for her, and tell her that the car would be ready in an hour—in half an hour—to take her into town—away from them all!

CHAPTER X

IT WAS left for Kent Ferguson, indifferent, casual, and in this particular case quite innocent of any intention whatsoever, to alter Jane Chatterton's plans. On the very morning of the day when Billy had questioned Juanita so concernedly about her departure, Jane had perfected them, superbly free of any suspicion that they would be—or could be—affected by the actions of anybody else in the world.

Hers was indeed a life of planning, of far-sighted adjustments and manipulations, and like every other leader, Jane was more often amused than surprised at the simplicity with which human beings fell gracefully into line. She told them what to think, and they duly thought it, she informed them as to their own courses of action, and they followed them. She often remembered one of the first of her social skirmishes, this one with a certain magnificent old Mrs. Bonner, who had come to call on the upstart nobody who had had the audacity to marry a Chatterton.

Mrs. Bonner's idea in calling had been to do the barely decent thing, and to snub the bride by omitting to invite her to the Bonner reception that was the opening event of the winter. And Jane had given her caller tea, and had told her, in charming young-wifely confidence, about the expected baby, and then had said: "Now, dear Mrs. Bonner, I do realize the position you're in—that people aren't quite ready to accept me and that they are all watching *you*. I can *so* easily plead my health as an excuse for not going out this winter, that if you're not going to ask me to your party, I shall *quite* understand! Carwood," Jane had added, as the embarrassed old lady had cleared

her throat, "Carwood says that his 'Aunt Kate,' as he calls you, isn't afraid of anybody, and that, if she feels like it, she'll have me in the receiving line, but although I don't know much about it, I tell him he's wrong there, that people *can't* always do as they like in these matters——"

The old lady had gone out to her carriage a few minutes later wondering how on earth it had happened that the handsome chatterbox Carwood had married was going to receive at her tea? But Kate Bonner, once she had placed her hand to the plough, was not one to weaken, and Chatterton's wife had duly mounted a dozen rounds of the social ladder with one spring, and smiled to herself whenever she thought about it.

It had been one of many triumphs; many adroit little deliberate misconceptions, inflections, interpretations. Jane was a master of such matters now, and had the confidence of long success.

So that this wintry morning between Christmas and New Year's found her with no misgivings. She had breakfasted, as usual, in bed, glancing at a magazine, at certain intimate letters, chatting over her coffee and rolls with her gallant old husband, who often came in at this hour, to sit in the sunny window, and discuss the newspaper, the mail, and plans for the day with her.

Then he had gone off for his bath, and Justine had summoned her to hers, and the pleasant, leisurely process of dressing had begun; the beautiful pink satin stays with their broad silk ribbons, the filmy "envelope," the snugly hooked band of satin and filet that served as a corset cover, the brief crêpe petticoat that would have gone through Jane's bracelet. Then—what was she doing? She was playing tennis with Mr. Ferguson? Mr. Chatterton and Mr. Billy were to play golf—oh, yes, and to lunch at the club. Then there would be just herself for lunch, please to tell Unger, unless possibly Mr. Ferguson would lunch with her. They might ask him.

Retta, the second little maid, picked out the rough low

shoes, the homespun stockings, the short pleated white woollen skirt, and the slim belted coat striped in blue and black and brown and green, while Justine loosened her mistress's hair in a mass on her shoulders, and worked the scalp with knowing fingers. Jane stretched bare feet to Retta, and it was then that she said, in French:

"Justine, when Mr. Chatterton and Mr. Billy have gone for their golf, not before, I want to see Miss Espinosa. She is going to-day, by the way."

"Oh, what a pity!" Justine ejaculated indifferently, in the pause.

"Yes, she insists upon leaving me," Jane Chatterton added. "So ask somebody to have one of the cars ready to take her to the two-forty train—I'll see that she's ready. And, Justine, you'll remember afterward that I haven't her address—nobody will ask for it, but in case anybody *should*."

"But, certainly, madam," Justine agreed. She was usually deep in a conspiracy, or a dozen, with her mistress. She liked intrigue. Mr. Billy was to be hoodwinked, thought Justine.

This settled, Jane let them mash a soft, rough white hat over her shining hair, pulled on loose white gloves, and, upon a sudden impulse, looked into her purse.

A hundred dollars, in five new bills. She imagined herself giving them to Juanita.

"I'll send you more long before those are gone, my dear, but I know how much a girl likes to have money in her hands! Be sure you report to me, now and then—oh, and one other thing," Jane would say, with an air of sudden recollection, "I'm going to ask you not to leave your address with anybody here except me." Let's see—what earthly reason could she give for that? Oh, yes. "Because Mr. Chatterton," she would say, "objects strongly to my interest in the Saint Monica Club. You know how absurd men are in their prejudices about their wives' interests? So don't tell *anyone*—

and, of course, I'll forward any letters, and see you one of these days, when I'm in town."

So that would fix *that*. Kent was going to Los Angeles, on the three o'clock train, on some mysterious business of Mr. Chatterton's, whatever it was, and he would be out of the way. Billy and his father would be playing something like the fourth hole at half-past two. And Jane could hear herself explaining to them, to-night, with righteous indignation, that little Miss Espinosa had found another position, it appeared, and had calmly given notice—walked off, right on the eve of the dinner party, and was to send an address—the impudence of the girl.

"Of course, I wasn't going to keep her, because she really can't do the work. But I do call this impudence!" she would add.

That would give her time. Time to settle things in a more permanent fashion, when she could once think them out clearly. Meanwhile, she played tennis with Kent in streaming cold winter sunshine, came in to weigh, to get into loose clothing, and to join him at lunch.

She looked surprised as she came into the beautiful, orderly dining room. Just two places? Oh, surely! Mr. Chatterton and Mr. Billy were at the club.

The shades were lowered, there was a shimmering tempered winter light in the room, catching itself on silver and glass, glimmering in the big mirrors. On the table was a low silver bowl of pale blue double violets, enchantingly sweet. Above the table an Italian chandelier, all dangling prisms, twinkled, shivered softly, tinkled a ghostly memory of long-quiet laughter.

Kent was in his usual place at these informal meals; at her right, so near that, when the dessert was served and they were alone, they could murmur together confidentially. And it was then that Jane received the first of the blows the day was to hold for her.

Her conversations with Kent were always brief, always strange. On the tennis court she used no more than monosyllables augmented by her steady unsmiling glances, emphasized, now and then, when she gave way to an especially teasing or thoughtful mood, with a touch of her hand, or perhaps by the introduction of the word "dear."

Kent thought this accidental, perhaps. Perhaps he thought that she was unconscious of it, that little appealing "dear" that sometimes in a tired, and sometimes in a glowing, moment crept into her speech to him.

For the rest, she did not need words. She saw what was in his smouldering, unhappy eyes, when she came downstairs with her husband, exquisite in every living, breathing, fragrant fibre of her, and let Kent hold her big fur coat for her. She caught his glance, that rebellious and yet uncontrollable glance of his, when she looked innocently up from a hand at bridge, from her book. She knew what was behind his gruff assent when she said: "Kent will take me, dear. That won't be inconvenient to you, Kent?"

It was all ridiculous, she reminded him, laughter in her beautiful eyes, sympathy in her rich voice. He must see that? He said briefly that, of course, he saw it. For the Lord's sake, he said ungraciously, suppose they talked of something else?

"Kent, my dear," she had said once, "I'm past forty. You're thirty-two."

"Exactly, Jane."

"Well—so now, isn't it, really, preposterous of you to let it make you unhappy?"

"Granted." He would go no further. He never annoyed her, never touched even her hand. But she knew what trembled between them, knew why his face was so dark, why he lumbered about in her wake like a savage, silent, unappeasable bear.

"Wouldn't you be happier, Kent—no, I mean this," she asked him—"if you gave up this special work for Mr.

Chatterton, and went back to newspaper work, and didn't see—anybody?"

"Very much happier," he answered unencouragingly. "What about it?"

"You mean—" They had been walking in the foothills back of the Chatterton estate; it was in the previous autumn, only a few days before her departure for Washington—"You mean that you—won't?" she had asked.

"Can't," he had answered, scowling. And although Jane had sighed, shrugged, and slowly shaken her head at him before resuming her tramp, something happy, wild, forbidden, had hammered in her breast, and all the adulation and pleasure, excitement and change of the trip had been unable to banish the memory of that autumn walk.

To-day, at the luncheon table, no especially personal note had been sounded between them. As far as Kent was concerned, it was not needed. Every moment that he was alone with her was throbbingly and confusingly personal; the tempered light, the tinkling chandelier, the dim vistas in the mirrors, and the fragrance of violets seemed all a part of her to-day—a part of her marvellous vitality, her abiding charm.

Just to sit here, with her white hands busy so near him, her clear brown eyes always ready to flash laughter, puzzlement, interrogation into his, was to experience one more of the perilously sweet hours in which—and in which only—he seemed to live.

"You're dressed for your trip?" she said.

"I changed fast. It's an awful hour to start anywhere, but I have to talk business with a fellow all the way down."

"Horrible thought!" Jane shuddered. "What sort of business?"

"Oh, clearing up this question of titles for the new *Sun* building!"

"That's to be that whole block on Mission Street? And

about time!" Jane commented, hesitating, shaking her head, suddenly deciding to have some more salad. "Are they still in those disgraceful offices in Sansome Street?" she asked.

"Still there. We've had all sorts of trouble, and we've had to work quietly, because the *Telegraph* people would love to get in their fine Italian hands, and mess the whole thing up!"

"How could they do that?" Jane asked superbly, shaking her head at bar-le-duc. "Doesn't Mr. Chatterton own the whole block?"

"Practically, now. There are a couple of pieces not clear. We don't want a spite building in there. By the way, Billy tells me that, if he graduates in June, he may start in on the *Sun*," Kent added interestedly.

"I want him to go round the world first—I think he should," his mother said. "I suppose his father will decide."

"That reminds me," Kent diverged, recalled to it by the mention of Billy's name, "Bill says that Miss Espinosa is leaving you?"

The ground rocked suddenly under Jane Chatterton's feet; the light in the room was staring, brassy, she felt a sudden vertigo, felt her mouth fill with salt water.

"Yes," she said simply, her heart pounding. What—what was happening now? How much—how little, did this mean?

"Billy heard his father say something of it, and asked her," Kent added. "I think he felt a little sorry."

Winter sunlight was streaming into the room, the clock ticked, the mirrors gave back the gleam and twinkle of the big chandelier, there were violets somewhere, deliciously sweet. Everything was waving slowly up and down, up and down.

"Haven't you," Kent was asking slowly, quietly, "a reason for *not* sending that girl away?"

"A r-r-reason?" she faltered, wetting her lips, staring at him blindly.

The butler was offering her something—a compote of stewed fruits—she shook her head, stood up shakily, one beautiful hand pressed by the tips of four tensed fingers on the table.

"Come into the library—I want to talk to you," she said, breathing unsteadily, a little dizzy, holding tightly to self-control. "No coffee—tell him no coffee——"

She led the way, Kent following in concern.

"What is it, Jane?" he asked anxiously, when she had seated herself in a deep chair and indicated, with a soundless word, that he was to sit opposite her. "I'm sorry!"

"What made you ask me," she said, smiling gallantly, but in a dry voice, and hardly above a whisper, "if I had a reason for keeping that girl here?"

"I'll tell you. You know," he interpolated, in a quieting tone, "that you haven't a friend in the world as loyal as I am, Jane!"

"Yes, I know—my dear, dear boy, indeed I know that!" she admitted feverishly, fervently. And she twisted her white fingers together and looked into the fire.

"I thought," he said simply, "that you had known her mother."

Her quick suspicious look was like that of a wild thing in a trap.

"She told you?" she asked sharply. "I knew it! Then—then she was lying to me!"

"No, she didn't tell me. She has never spoken to me at all of the matter," Kent said.

Jane drew a deep, relieved breath. The room seemed to settle into its reassuring, quiet self again, the world, behind it, to grow steady, to sink from mad menace and panic into calm. She still was panting, biting her red underlip, watching him closely. But she was getting herself in hand, he saw, ready for one more battlefield.

"Tell me," she commanded simply.

"Do you remember a day last fall, when you and I and Mr. Chatterton went down to Pebble Beach for some golf?" he asked.

She nodded, very pale.

"You remember that you started off, the second morning, for a run in a small closed car alone? Some friend's car?"

"Edith Day's car," she said.

"Yes. And that a message that Justine thought was very important came for you immediately afterward?"

"And that you followed me down the coast with it on a motor cycle you borrowed at the hotel—yes, and met me at that little hotel—where was it?—some place down there? Solito, yes," she repeated the name as he supplied it. "And you gave me the message and started back!"

"Only I didn't go back!" he confessed.

"You followed me. Why?" she said, in a silence.

"Because——" He shrugged. "Because I *do* follow you, Jane, perhaps," he offered simply.

"You got to that old rancho that was cut off by the tide?"

"And met this girl," he nodded.

"Juanita, of course. And my cousin—the Señora?"

"She was your cousin?"

"Not by blood, no." The quick, imperious voice fell. "But we loved each other," Jane said slowly.

"No, I didn't meet her, or anybody, except Juanita. I was caught there, as you were, and saw you leave, in the morning," Kent explained. "I followed you, got back to Pebble Beach about noon, made my explanations as you made yours, and that was the end of it. Later, while you were in the East, I went down there again—I had been thinking of the girl I met there. I found, as you know, that the mother had died, leaving her nothing. Miss Russell's advertisement for a social secretary was right there, on the floor. I kept my own counsel, and only suggested that she apply for the place. It occurred to me that you might be

glad to get hold of her; naturally, I don't want to interfere in your private affairs," Kent added, "but *I* didn't know but what you'd clasp her in your arms! Apparently you didn't—that's all. It does seem, however, a shame to turn such an extremely pretty little thing loose——"

He left the sentence suspended in the air, and for a few seconds there was silence in the library.

Jane was much quieter, her brow knitted, her eyes narrowed; she was quite obviously planning already, determining her own position.

"Does she know this?" she asked presently.

"She only knows that some woman came to see her mother and left early in the morning. She says that Spanish people are strong on secrets, and that her mother was not an expansive person, anyway."

Again the woman pondered, her fingers to her cheek, her breath still a little uneven. Kent saw her slightly shake her head and bite her lip.

"I have no objection to your knowing that I knew her mother," she presently said quietly, "nor to her knowing it, for that matter, although I would rather not. My first thought, when I saw her here, was that in some way she knew of my friendship—my connection with her family. But it seems that she does not. For several reasons——" Her voice fell, she was silent, pondering. "For several reasons, it doesn't seem wise to keep her here, and I have made arrangements to have her well cared for elsewhere. Let me think a moment——"

She got up and walked to the hearth, standing there with one pretty foot resting against the brass rail that connected the fire dogs, her beautiful head a little drooped, her hand spread, white and slim and jewelled, upon the dark stone of the mantel.

"I don't want any further complication about this thing," she admitted frankly, "and yet I can't arouse her—Juanita's

—curiosity by letting her see too clearly that I am getting rid of her."

"Especially as Billy is impressionable," Kent suggested, "and he certainly has rather taken a fancy to her."

"Exactly." Her eyes looked dark in her suddenly whitened face. "Such an affair—any serious affair—would be the death blow to his father's hopes for him," she said. "Well. There is some way out of this——"

She was superb, he thought, in her courage, in the confidence with which she rallied her forces.

"I was going to ask her to say nothing of her going," she recommenced, "but it seemed hardly necessary. Now I am wondering if it might not be wiser to keep the child here, quietly, until Billy is back in college, and then perhaps——"

Again she mused.

"He goes on the fourth," she said, "and Élise Coleman is sailing for Manila on the eighth. She'd jump at a chance to take a companion like Juanita—she's got the baby with her. Perhaps the most sensible thing, not to awaken any interest on Billy's part, might be to try to arrange that."

"Mightn't the wisest thing be to talk to the girl, herself—tell her frankly," Kent hazarded. "She's a sensible little thing. Her interest in her own history is only because she loves that old place so; she would be so glad to find any way to claim it—or part of it, or the Espinosa name, anyway! Her mother, dying, left her directions, it seems, to find some relative, some man who could help her clear it all up."

"Who was that?" Jane asked sharply.

"I don't know the name. Anyway, she can't find him. But it seems to me, Jane, that, whatever the mystery is, it wouldn't do much harm to talk to her."

She had seated herself again and seemed to have entirely recovered her self-control. Now it was with her usual splendid air of complete mastery over the situation that she said, confidently and sensibly:

"No, I can't do that, not now, at any rate. It may come to that. But, in the first place, there is always the danger of too much talking, in such a case, and in the second place, I am in a position to know that she would gain nothing—absolutely nothing—by learning the little I could tell her. The Señora Maria Espinosa sent for me last autumn—true—and we had a talk about the disposition of this child, and her future, in case of poor Maria's death. I had no idea, at the time, that she was so ill; perhaps she had some premonition of it, poor soul. It must have taken place only a few days later, while I was on my way East. But, by an extraordinary coincidence, I found the girl here in my house when I came back. So that I shall be able to do for her all that I could have done, in any case. There's only one thing. Knowing what I know of her ancestry," she added slowly, finding her words with a little difficulty, "I know that Mr. Chatterton would never forgive my running the risk of Billy's coming to care for her. My keeping of a friend's secret, from his standpoint, would be bad enough; my escapade down the coast that night, the fact that the instant my eyes fell on this girl last week, the instant I knew who she was, I didn't take him into my confidence—even that he would bitterly resent.

"And I have been stupid about it," she added. "But it all belongs to long-ago days, when Maria Espinosa was a young woman—even now there's nothing to tell, and I can't tell it!" she finished, smiling. "I must see that she and Billy don't have any opportunities of being together. I suppose I exaggerate that danger," she confessed; "yet it is always a very real one, when a girl is so pretty."

"And she is a great deal more than that," Kent said, rather unexpectedly, even to himself.

"You find her attractive, too?" she asked quickly.

"I can't imagine anyone not finding her so," he answered slowly, his grave look meeting her eyes. "She has a quality—I don't know what to call it. Like one's little sister—

companionable, chatty—she's the most sympathetic young girl I ever knew. I like and admire her very much."

Mrs. Chatterton said nothing to this. She looked at him steadily with thoughtful, somewhat surprised eyes.

"If I place her somewhere in the city, say, with good people—presuming that she gets back from the Philippines before we go abroad in May—would you see her sometimes, Kent?" she asked, after a silence.

"Gladly," he answered simply.

"My fault in all this business," Mrs. Chatterton presently admitted, "has been too much secrecy. It is a constant curse to a nature like mine, and yet it is so much a part of me," she added, half to herself, "that even while I am regretting—while I am paying for one piece of deception, I am as likely as not involving myself in another. It's a part of such a life as mine, Kent, pulling myself up from nothing, fighting my own way. This affair—this affair that involves Juanita—came into my life just at the time Mr. Chatterton was paying attention to me. I was—dizzied with excitement. Probably, if I had told him then about my share of the matter, he would have taken the whole thing as a matter of course—wives realize that, after they are married. You may tell a man anything—anything, while he desires only *you*.

"But my policy had always been to tell *nothing*. I didn't tell the women I met, as young Mrs. Carwood Chatterton, that I had been born in a four-room flat over a saloon in Folsom Street. I didn't tell them that I had a brother who was sent to San Quentin for forgery and died there——"

He had never seen her in this mood before. She had always been magnificent, she had never, in his knowledge of her, faltered. Now she seemed to see the triumphant years as so much failure, not worth the effort, a sordid, blind struggle toward—nothing, after all. To see her drooping, discouraged, was to discover another Jane, and one whose appeal tugged at his heart.

"Let me tell you—for I don't often have the relief of speaking honestly!" she said, in a somewhat lighter tone, and with a half-sad smile, "let me tell you some of the desperate chances I took, just at the time of my marriage. I was poor, a nobody, ambitious, ashamed—ever since I can remember anything—of a father who drank, with a mother whose only fault seemed to be that she never, under any circumstances, did *anything*, and this poor brother who brought shame and sorrow on us all. I worked in a millinery shop, Kent. And there I met a newspaper man, a dear, fine, earnest Irish boy named Walsingham, and we became engaged. Through him I met the managing editor, a divorced man, handsome, dashing—of course, the most magnificent person I'd ever seen. So I dropped little Tommy Walsingham and became engaged to Rufus Miller. *That*, with his motor car, and his income of eight thousand a year, was so thrilling a flight for me that my one fear was that I would die before our wedding day! About a month before, he introduced me to Carwood Chatterton, owner of the paper, about forty, and childless and widowed.

"Of course, you can see what I did. And perhaps a girl," Jane went on, "has a perfect right to make and break as many engagements as she likes. But I never told Carwood all that. I never mentioned Rufus or Tommy. I put it behind me. I've put everything, everything, behind me. The things I did when I was first getting my foothold in society—the mistakes I made, the furniture I bought, the women I cultivated. All behind me. And with them the story of this poor child, who rose up like a ghost the other night!"

"The Señora," Kent questioned, more stirred by the honesty of her little recital than he could say, "was not her mother?"

"No."

"And—one more question. Is she legitimate?"

"No," Jane said slowly, after a moment's hesitation.

"Her mother was a little actress, dead now many years. The way I was brought into it——" She stopped.

Kent glanced at her thoughtfully, but she was not looking at him. She was staring at the top of her own slipper, her face grave, her breath still a little uneven but no longer frightened.

"Will you tell me this? Is she your brother's child?"

She looked up, surprised.

"No," she said again simply. And Kent questioned her no further. "I saw, in Carwood Chatterton," she added, "a chance beyond my wildest dreams. I told him nothing that would frighten him away—nothing of my people, not even of my job, nor my brother. I sent them money, I went regularly to see them—while they lived—but I never told him. And I don't want to tell him now!"

And as she spoke she walked again to the fire and turned to smile at Kent, over her shoulder, as he followed her there.

"There!" she said, "you know more of me now than any other living person! Perhaps it will help you to—understand me. I'll send for Juanita now and make some excuse for keeping her here until Billy goes back to college. And then I'll place her somewhere where she'll be perfectly happy and he can't find her. And if everything goes wrong," she finished whimsically, "and my husband insists upon the—the perfect second act—will you come and see me, exiled in a little Paris apartment? Could you like me as much a failure as a success? Could you be the friend of a woman who had played her cards as badly as all that?"

He lifted her hand, kissed the soft white fingers.

"Try me," he said—a little huskily.

She put both her hands tensely, tightly on his, and as she leaned back, with closed eyes, he saw the pulse throb in her white throat.

"Kent," she whispered, "perhaps I may!"

When he left her, a few seconds later, to catch his train, Jane had already sent for Juanita, and Kent could tell, by the quiet, poised definiteness of her manner, that there would be no faltering now. He was not surprised, upon his return, on New Year's Eve, to find the household running as peacefully, to all appearances, as if there had never been a break.

Preparations for the big dinner party were under way; Billy would, of course, attend the New Year's dance, for the younger set, at the club. Jane seemed serene, directing her secretary with all her old suavity, the English accent, the surface of bored sweetness, the crisp efficiency underneath.

She seized an opportunity to tell him that in a few days she was going to drive into San Francisco and take Juanita with her.

"As I told you, Élise Coleman is sailing for Manila on the eighth, and I'm to see her a few days before that," said Jane. "I knew that Élise had been madly trying to get just the right person to go with her and the baby, who is six months old, and perfectly adorable, and I telephoned her yesterday that I might persuade Miss Espinosa to go. She was enchanted—just what she wants, a lady, yet a real, practical companion and helper. Jud Coleman meets them, and the life there ought to be perfectly fascinating—his brother Harold is there, too, they say the most fascinating bachelor in the service.

"If I can talk Juanita into it, to-morrow, after Billy has gone off to Del Monte with the Hamiltons for two days, I will simply drive her in, hurry it through, buy her a big coat and a steamer hat——"

"—and shanghai her," Kent finished. "Yes," he said, "you might do it, Jane. There's no other woman in the world who could—but you might. And it seems a happy solution for her. Did you ever meet this Harold Coleman?" he asked carelessly.

"She may baulk," Jane was murmuring, "but I don't think she will." And as he watched her go upstairs to dress, Kent told himself again that she was the most astonishing woman in the world.

Later, he caught a glimpse of Juanita, tired, excited, flushed with interest and enthusiasm, her drifted gold hair in disorder. She was slipping about back passages, interviewing servants, caterers, decorators.

"Doesn't the house look heavenly?" Juanita asked him. "Don't you love that evergreeny smell? And hear the horns already in the village—and it's only eight o'clock! I've been having more *fun*. I've been eating cold turkey and mashed eclairs and stuffed olives and rhum baba—I'm going to hide up here, behind the palms, and see them come in!"

"Me, too," Kent murmured, wedging himself in beside her, as the downstairs door opened, letting in the dark streaming night air and the muffled laughing forms of the first guests. And together they huddled in the shelter, peeping, jerking back, peeping again.

"Look, here she comes!" Juanita whispered. And Kent turned to see Mrs. Chatterton slowly descending from the top step of the great stairway.

She wore ivory satin, wound about her like the sheath of a lily. Her round, perfect arms, her flawless shoulders and throat were bare; there was no touch of colour to the costume, but stretched tight over the satin, and falling loosely against the train, was cobwebby old creamy lace. On her dark head was a Juliet cap of great pearls, fitted close, and she wore, besides, the Chatterton pearls—Juanita had not seen them before, but she had heard of them. A triple rope of the perfect, rose-tinged globes lay about her throat, her delicate hand was freighted with them, and the creamy pinkness of two perfect specimens shone in the dark curls beneath her ears. They laid delicate umber shadows upon the brilliant white-

ness of her skin; they seemed to light a strange soft brilliance in her dark eyes.

Deliberately, in the setting of dark rugs and palms, the gleam of the heavy, hand-carved balustrade, she descended. Carwood Chatterton, glowing with pride, came across the lower floor to meet her and, with a courtly bow, gave her his arm.

The circling groups of her guests came forward, a joyous babel of voices began.

"Jane, don't be discouraged!" Juanita heard a man's voice say joyfully. "Looks aren't everything! You'll be a good-lookin' girl when you get your growth!"

"Oh, never, I'm afraid, Tom," the rich voice answered regretfully, in a moment's silence. "That's, I'm afraid, *quite* out of the question!"

"That's—I'm afraid—quite out of the question!"

The phrase seemed to linger in the softly scented, warm air. It made Juanita's senses swim suddenly, and her heart beat fast, as if with fright. She had heard that phrase—and that voice—somewhere before—somewhere——

Suddenly, she was back at the hacienda, up on the narrow, leaf-strewn adobe porch, leaning over, looking down through the willows at two women talking there in a cool autumn dawning.

Hidden behind the palms, she caught Kent tightly, the tense fingers of both hands pressing into his arms, her agitated face raised to his own.

"Kent—Kent!" she whispered. "That's who she is! She's the same woman—the woman you followed—the woman I saw! Isn't she? *Isn't* she?"

"Sh-h-h!" he answered, restraining her, anxious at her agitation. "Not so loud! You'll be heard."

"No, but, Kent—did you hear her? Ah," breathed Juanita, looking down through the palms at the festival scene

below again, her breath coming fast, her bright hair shaken back in her excitement, her cheeks burning, "Ah—I've found *you*, anyway! That's the first step."

"Come upstairs, you wild sea gull!" Kent whispered. "I believe you are right. But come upstairs where we can talk about it!"

CHAPTER XI

ON THE first morning of the new year, a late silence reigned in the Chatterton house. It was nearly nine o'clock before the maids and men began their work downstairs, noiselessly carrying away dustpans of confetti and paper ribbons, broken horns and clackers, letting out the close, cigar-scented air, letting in the cold, clean sunshine of a windless winter morning. They folded card tables, pushed chairs into place, brushed, dusted, straightened.

The outside men had departed at midnight, leaving glasses and plates cleanly stacked, but out of place. Piles of heavy, crumpled napkins cluttered the pantry, punch glasses and ash trays.

Like an army, the household staff spent the morning of New Year's Day silently in attacking the wreckage. They filed about like ants, laden with armfuls of linen and drooping flowers, chrysanthemums that bled bitter wilted leaves across the carpets, roses three feet tall, pale, pink, and soggy after their dissipated night.

Miss Espinosa and Mr. Ferguson came in, ruddy, cold, starving, after a walk to church, and had their breakfast on the end of the pantry table, wishing everyone a Happy New Year, apparently in high spirits. Even Dudgeon, the head butler, was won from his sense of outrage at their familiarities to a sort of grudging good-nature, as he went majestically back and forth with the silver and crystal, the maids were openly hilarious, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Murdock, bustled about in motherly fashion among them all, delighted that all had gone so well the previous night, and inclined to be complacent this morning.

As Kent pushed his chair back, he said significantly to Juanita: "You're going to see Mrs. Chatterton this morning?"

"Can it do any harm?" she asked, instead of answering, as they crossed the service hall to separate for the morning.

"Can it do any good? If she really is that friend who came down to see your mother, she apparently doesn't want you to know it. Don't risk—antagonizing her."

"But, why," Juanita asked bewilderedly, "should she keep me in the dark? She might know something about the man, you know, the man my mother told me to find. Kent," the girl added, "I thought of this this morning, while we were at breakfast: do you think it is possible that she is trying, deliberately, to get rid of me? Might that be the explanation of her wanting to send me away? You see, this Miss Peters, who was to come from Washington, hasn't written or sent any message, for I would have been the one to get it! I don't believe there *is* any Miss Peters!"

"But, why?" he asked, watching her closely.

"Well, that's what I thought I'd ask her, try to find out!" she answered triumphantly.

"I wouldn't," Kent said slowly.

"Wouldn't!" she echoed incredulously.

"No, I wouldn't. She's evidently interested in you, she wants to be your friend, she couldn't do more for you than she has promised to do, and if I were you I'd let well enough alone."

Juanita frowned, staring beyond him into space.

"Well, if she sends me away," she said finally, "I shall *know* that she knows something! Because she really *needs* me," Juanita added, with a little pride that made Kent smile.

"She might," he suggested doubtfully, "feel that you were just as well out of Billy's way. His father has great hopes for Billy!"

The girl flushed, laughed indifferently.

"Oh, nonsense! He's a *boy*. He does that sort of thing with every girl he meets!"

"Does what sort of thing?" Kent asked, with some little apprehension. He was glad Jane was not hearing this!

"Oh, flirts," Juanita answered, a little vaguely.

"Does he flirt?"

"Oh, well, you know what I mean. Says nice things," the girl smiled serenely. "Like all the others! Silly stuff."

"H'm!" Kent mused. "Well, his father might object to that," he suggested.

"Well, he needn't!" Juanita assured him, with spirit. "There isn't any danger in that direction!"

And with her back very straight, and her coat and hat and gloves in her hand, she walked proudly away.

Billy had not put in an appearance this morning. The clocks struck ten, struck eleven, and there was no summons from either the master or the mistress of the house.

Carwood Chatterton had not retired until almost three, and that after a long evening of talking, eating, drinking, laughing, sharing all the hilarity of his guests, stimulating and encouraging it. For years, confined to a rather limited diet, he had "fallen off" last night, had found himself munching cakes, canapes, chocolates, sipping strong drink, smoking too much, advising a pretty woman as to a double of hearts, guiding a male friend to the little bar in the library. It had all been successful, delightful, everything that he could wish it to be, and his wife, in her creamy satin, her Juliet cap, her pearls, had been a picture of matchless beauty, the centre of all the gaiety, throughout the evening. But it had been a strain.

And he was tired. He lay in bed, with his papers and his mail, sipping coffee, adjusting his glasses, now and then staring up at the ceiling with a thoughtful, dignified "Hem!"

The beautiful mistress of the house kept her room this morning, too. At ten o'clock her rich dark curled head

turned restlessly in all its little embroidered baby pillows, and Jane said, "Oh, dear!" in a desolated voice, and sat up, clutching more pillows upon which to prop her shoulders.

"Awake, madam?" Justine asked respectfully, solicitously.

"Oh, Justine—I've been awake for an hour, trying to go off again!" Jane answered, pushing her hair from her forehead with a frantic motion of crooked fingers. "No use! Oh, dear!"

"The hot bath—the coffee——" Justine suggested sympathetically, raising shades and adjusting curtains.

"Oh, not yet. Oh," said her mistress, locking her slim bare arms behind her head. "I'm *dead*. Quarter past ten, and I meant to sleep until noon! Any message from Mr. Chatterton?"

"Except that Waters said that he was asleep, madam."

"Well, that's a solid gain, at any rate," Jane said. "Have you seen Mr. Billy?"

"He did not come in until six o'clock, madam. I think he must be also asleep."

"Well—you might bring me tne papers, and any letters there are." Jane sat up, raised a large hand glass from the bedside table, looked at herself with a faintly wrinkled brow and a bitten lip. The need of serious and constructive thought was heavy upon her, but she was tired. It seemed impossible to bring to her wearied head the problems of yesterday, reconstruct them, and give them her attention.

At all events, the dinner had been a brilliant and unqualified success, so much was satisfactory. It would be a long time before society stopped talking about the Chattertons' New Year party; the supper room all snow-powdered, tinselled Christmas trees, the English carol singers outside the library windows, the hundreds of silver glinting cotton snowballs with which the merry war of horns and confetti had been augmented when the midnight bells began. Jane told herself that she knew when a dinner was merely expensive, top-

heavy, and dull. And she knew a success when she saw it, too!

But now it was over. One more triumph, but already in the past. And, meanwhile, there was to-day's tangle. It had been a long time, she reflected, since she had indulged in the childish mood of wishing the present gone, wishing the calendar already well into next week, but she was conscious of that old, cowardly wish this morning. Once the girl was well upon her way to Manila, once Billy safely back in college, then everything would straighten out. It was time, only time, that any problem needed!

Presently she had her bath; at eleven o'clock she was back in bed again, considerably cheered by the contents of her breakfast tray. She glanced indifferently at the newspaper, glanced at a new magazine, lay for perhaps twenty minutes staring thoughtfully into space, and finally sent a summons to Miss Espinosa. Mrs. Chatterton would like to speak to her, please.

The message had no sooner gone than Billy lumbered in, tousle-headed, bunched into an enormous dressing gown, pale and yawning.

"Oh, Mother, my Lord, what a night!"

"You horrible smelly infant," she said, with her kiss. "Are you dead?"

Her mind worked rapidly behind the leisurely affectionate tone. He mustn't see Juanita. There must be no hitch here.

"No," he answered, sunk into a chair, and apparently going to sleep, with his head bowed on his knees. "That's the trouble."

"Black coffee, darling?"

"Oh, hell, no!"

"Headache?"

"Oh, my *Lord*——"

She nodded to Justine. The maid presently held a white

tablet and a small glass of hot clear water at Billy's elbow, and he gratefully gulped them down.

"Have a good time yourself, Mom?"

"Oh, marvellous. One of the best. There wasn't a hitch or a break—I never gave a better party."

"You never looked more utterly gorgeous," he said sincerely.

"Why, thank you, darling. I liked my gown."

"Mother," he said haggardly, looking up, "do you realize that in exactly one hour I am supposed to join those Hamilton girls for a hundred-mile run down to Del Monte? I can't *do* it."

"Oh, yes, you can!" she assured him cheerfully, over a feeling of ice gripping her heart. "Take your bath, drink some coffee, you'll be all right! You know," she added, hugging her own knees, as she sat up like a pretty gipsy in bed, with her dark curls on her shoulders, "you know, they're probably pretty well tired this morning, too!"

"I'd be for calling the whole party off," said Billy darkly.

"Oh, darling, you can't do that! The fresh air will do you all good, you'll get some golf in this afternoon and tomorrow, and be home Sunday feeling like a different creature. Whereas, if you mope about in the house all day——"

"Why not you and I and Kent, and maybe Miss Espinosa, if she'll go, take a walk this afternoon?" he suggested. "She's an awfully sweet girl."

It had come. The thing she had not been able to face even in her own thoughts for all these years. It was here. This was no feminine bit of foolish apprehension, the fruit of imagination and nerves. No, it was here.

The room turned slowly dark. Billy's voice seemed to come from infinite muffled distances, out of darkness.

"Well—suppose you telephone, when you're dressed, and see how the Hamilton girls feel, dear?"

"How do you feel about a walk, Mom?"

"You know how I'd love it, Billy." Her smile, he thought, was that of an overtired woman. She looked wan, now that he gave her a real scrutiny, there were deep shadows under her eyes.

"Funny—" she said slowly—"I had a sensation then of dizziness, almost of nausea. Horrible!"

"Well, I'll get out and you go back to sleep!" He leaned over to kiss her again, and she clutched at him with an agonized hand.

"My darling!" she murmured, in a strained voice.

"Good old mom," he muttered back affectionately. And gathering his voluminous bathrobe once more about him, he was gone.

A few moments later, Juanita came in.

Mrs. Chatterton, deep in an illustrated magazine, looked up, a little surprised, and smiled.

"Oh, good-morning. How fresh you look, in this household of jaded revellers. Happy New Year!" Jane said, letting the magazine slip to the floor, pushing back the loose richness of thin frills and ribbons from her wrists, and settling herself expectantly. "I sent for you, my dear," she said, "because I have a little programme in my mind arranged for you, and I want to talk it over with you. The difficulty—alas!—is *time*, and that's why I am not losing a second about it. Sit down."

Juanita sat down, in a chair near the bed, facing her employer.

"That's right. Justine, I wonder if you would draw those shades—thanks. And get your luncheon, will you?—for I am going to be lazy to-day. Now, this is my plan," Jane continued comfortably, when she and Juanita were alone. "I have a very dear, sweet little friend named Élise Coleman, Mrs. Judson Coleman, who is sailing for Manila a week from to-morrow."

She added the last word deliberately and after a slight

pause. But Juanita, who could see no possible connection between it and herself, continued to regard her gravely, expectantly.

"Élise is an adorable girl, she was a Vander Wyck," resumed Jane, encouraged, "and she has the most adorable baby. The husband is an army man, and a fine fellow, stationed in a post outside of Manila for two years. Élise—and this is where you come in—has been desperately trying for months to find a companion. Not a servant—those places swarm with servants," she added, "not a nurse, for the baby will have a native nurse, of course—they are wonderful, everyone says. But a companion, a girl who will enjoy the trip, enjoy the place, be a member of the family. Mr. Coleman will naturally be away a great part of the time; he wants to feel that someone is always with her. Now, the point is this: Would you consider such a position?"

"I?" Juanita said, her eyes widening.

"You."

"To go—to the Philippines?" the girl mused, rather than asked, her brows knitted. And in a flash her words to Kent this morning came back to her. "If she sends me away, I shall *know* that she knows something about me."

A sort of fear, excitement, and hope fluttered in her heart, she felt herself beginning to tremble.

"It is an opportunity in a lifetime for the girl who can take it," Jane observed, watching her closely.

"But you said—a week from to-morrow?"

"A week from to-morrow afternoon, January eighth."

Juanita was young, she had never travelled. She had a dazzled vision of the trackless ocean, steamer decks, strange ports, and yellow faces.

"I have had Mrs. Coleman on the telephone this morning," said Mrs. Chatterton, glancing at the instrument that stood beside her bed, "and she is delighted. Her family is interested in that line of steamers, you know; there'll be no

trouble about accommodations, and you will be treated royally during the trip. They stop, I think she said, for two days at Honolulu——"

"Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita said suddenly, almost as much to her own surprise as to that of the other woman, "why do you want to send me away?"

Jane merely looked at her steadily, and the rush of emotion that had prompted Juanita to the daring speech died under that quiet, astonished stare.

"What did you say?"

"Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita pursued desperately, frightened now, but too deeply involved to escape. "Do you know anything about me? Won't you tell me? Did you know my mother?"

"Your mother?" Jane echoed, her eyes not moving from Juanita's face, a faint incredulous accent on the last word.

"The Señora Espinosa, of the rancho de los Amigos," Juanita said, forlorn, yet eager. "Didn't you know her—weren't you ever down at Solito?"

The girl had not talked to Kent—she knew nothing, Jane's thoughts said, racing, doubling, tumbling over each other in a mad moment of panic. She knew nothing. She was only guessing.

"At Solito? And where is Solito?" she asked sympathetically. And she fixed upon Juanita a kindly, encouraging smile, as if she were trying to help an incoherent child to make herself clear.

"Some woman came down there—one day last fall!" the girl said. "I ask you because there is a sort of mystery about my name," Juanita plunged on, beginning to be ashamed of herself. "My mother told me the name of a man I must find——"

"A relative?"

"Oh, no—or, at least, she didn't say so. She told me only the name. It doesn't matter much to anyone else, I

suppose," the girl added proudly, fighting a sudden agonizing inclination to tears, "but it does matter to *me*. And—and I can't find him!"

"What is the name?" Jane asked.

"She asked me, 'for everyone's sake,' she said, not to tell it, Mrs. Chatterton."

"I see." Jane lay silent for a moment, looking at her steadily. "Let me understand you, my dear child," she said presently. "Why do you think I may know something of this?"

"You weren't ever down at Solito? You didn't go there last fall, and get caught by the tide, and stay with my mother —with the Señora, overnight?"

Jane fumbled under her pillow for a wispy handkerchief, touched her nose with it, sniffed, and dropped the handkerchief on her table, without ever moving her eyes from Juanita's face.

"Tell me all about it," she invited suddenly, as to an excited child.

"There's nothing to tell," Juanita said slowly and forlornly, all the courage that had spurred her to this point ebbing suddenly and leaving her to feel a little ridiculous in a sense of anticlimax. "A woman came to see my mother —if Señora Espinosa *was* my mother!—and I saw her, just once, for she was veiled, and heard her voice, just once—but it was *your* voice—it was your voice, just as you spoke last night when you came downstairs! You said, 'That's quite out of the question—never. Never!' And I remembered it just as if it had been yesterday!"

Her own earnestness had dried the tears that had started when she commenced to speak, and after she finished there was a brief silence, while Jane continued to study her thoughtfully, with a kind and interested expression in her fine dark eyes.

"But, now tell me—I'm still in the dark. This woman you think knew your mother—didn't your mother ever mention her?"

"She never mentioned anything!" Juanita confessed, in a distressed burst.

"But among her letters or in her address book?" the older woman suggested.

"The Señora didn't write letters and she had no address book. If she had any papers," Juanita said, "they were all burned!"

"*All?*" Jane asked slowly.

"Oh, every line! And until I find somebody—somebody—" Juanita broke out, in despair—"I shan't even know who I am—or what my name is! There was a man, a man my mother knew, and I think *he* knows—but I can't find him."

"Your mother never told you these things?" Jane, after a musing pause, demanded sympathetically.

"Never. Never anything!"

"And what makes you think that there is any mystery about it?"

"Because my mother—" Juanita answered, upon a sudden rush of tears—"my mother *knew* how I loved the old rancho, that it was home to me—the only place in the world I want to be! And she left it, her will said, to her 'nearest of kin'—to the Espinosa cousins of Mexico City!"

Jane Chatterton frowned, pondering, for a few moments, while Juanita, ashamed of her emotion, ashamed of her effrontery in troubling her employer with her obscure little problem, walked to the window and stood staring out, with swimming eyes, at the bare wintry garden below it.

"They wouldn't sell it?" Mrs. Chatterton suggested presently.

"Oh, that's it," Juanita said, wiping her eyes, gulping, and returning to her seat by the bed. "It is for sale. They

want thirty-five thousand dollars for it—but that's too much, Kent says," she added, off guard.

The clear bright eyes so near her narrowed a trifle, and Mrs. Chatterton said, in a slightly changed voice:

"Kent?"

"Mr. Ferguson," Juanita amended, flushing scarlet. "I talked to him a little about it——"

"Does he know the name of the man you are trying to find?" Jane asked.

"Nobody but myself knows it."

"And what steps have you taken to find it?" the other woman presently asked.

"I've hunted through directories, I went over the records at the old Mission of San Esteban. There doesn't seem much else to do."

"No, does there?" Jane murmured. And for a moment she lay still, thinking.

Then there was a knock at the door. It was Billy, in his big coat, and with a cap pulled over his eyes, to say good-bye. The Hamilton girls had been as fresh as paint this morning, he disgustedly explained, they had laughed down his hints of postponing the trip. So he was off for a couple of days at Del Monte—damn it, he added frankly. He kissed his mother, and nodded ruefully at Juanita, who could not help laughing at his manner of a sulky little boy.

When he was gone again, Jane breathed a deep breath of secret relief. At least Billy wouldn't be here to complicate the affair that must be settled in the next few days. To have even so much of her programme work smoothly somewhat restored her confidence in herself, and it was with something of her usual superb manner that she said presently:

"Well, will you think over the Manila project? I must go into town early Monday morning, anyway, and could take you with me. We can talk about clothes just as soon as you make up your mind. I shall have luncheon with Mrs.

Coleman, when you could meet her, and I'm quite sure you would like each other."

"Thank you," Juanita said slowly, standing up. "I'll think about it," she promised, as she went away.

Left alone, Jane lay still for a long time, musing. The sunlight shifted toward the southwest, left the clear muslins at her windows, the wood fire died, and the room grew cool with the dull quiet of winter noon.

She breathed evenly, her eyes narrowed, her full lower lip lightly caught in her teeth. Justine, odorous of mutton, coffee, and apple pie, peeped in once or twice, went discreetly away again.

In little more than eight days, mused Jane Chatterton, the big Japanese liner would be upon her way, steaming slowly out of the Golden Gate for the far Orient. Eight days! And in that time she must obtain Juanita Espinosa's consent to making the trip, smuggle her out of the house without any particular ostentation, get the girl and her trunk on board, meanwhile lunching with Élise, chattering, laughing, as if nothing more serious than the good-natured accommodation of a friend was afoot.

It would be a strain, but it could be done. Jane had managed worse than this, in her time. The very quickness that was part of it was inspiring; and success meant that no later than a week from to-morrow night she might be placidly playing bridge with Carwood and a couple of intimates, ready to tell Billy, if he questioned her, that little Miss Espinosa had simply given her the slip, taken French leave, promised to "send an address."

Risky, but then risks were nothing. At Billy's age, three months—six months of separation were miracle workers, especially as his graduation and his first trip to Europe since childhood would be included in those six months. The accident of his some day meeting Élise Coleman, and of Élise happening to tell him that Juanita Espinosa had accompanied

her to Manila, was, to say the least of it, remote. By the time the Colemans were home from the Philippines, Billy would have forgotten the very name of Juanita Espinosa.

The one real hitch in the plan lay with the girl. Jane dared not bribe her, that would be to arouse her worst suspicions. She dared not bind her to silence, to ask her not to mention the mystery in her own story would be simple madness, unless Jane could give a reason, and she had none to give.

Suppose she partly confided in Juanita, temporized? Suppose she said frankly to the girl: "I *do* know something of your history, my dear, and as soon as I may, I will tell you all I know. Meanwhile, will you promise me never to mention what you have asked me, or told me, to anyone, and I will see that your needs are generously supplied."

No, this would be to court danger. Not but what every path led to danger. For the cataclysm had come, the thing she had been afraid to formulate even in her thoughts was here. Here under her own roof, looking into her eyes.

It only remained now to fight to the end, perhaps in a losing fight. The chances of a safe issue now were small indeed.

But Jane would not think of what she might lose. She centred her activities upon what she must save: Billy, his father, her own place in the sun. Nothing but utter courage, utter daring, mad chances, would avail now, and she must be prepared for them.

One shivering fear shook her. Might she go to Carwood now, find him the adoring, admiring husband of last night, tell him everything? With him behind her, she would be afraid of nothing. But as the phrases she must use came to her, a sick revulsion weakened every fibre of her being. No, she couldn't risk that, even though she risked everything else.

She put her finger on her bell.

"Justine, I'll dress now. Mr. Chatterton and I are riding

at one, and we'll lunch at the club. Ask Miss Espinosa to bring my letters here at about six o'clock."

"Madam has had a good rest," Justine observed, in satisfaction.

"Splendid," Jane assented. She looked her most beautiful self as she went downstairs in her riding clothes half an hour later; her dark hair crisp under the dashing hat, her figure outlined in the long coat, the slim legs encased in breeches and high leather boots. The costume was completed by a high white stock and a frill; in Carwood Chatterton's eyes, as he joined her, she read his admiration.

The old man presented a gallant figure, too; he looked the picture of an English squire as he mounted his big dappled gray. Jane rode a beautiful bay; her colour came up as they cantered along in the crisp sunlight, under the live oaks; the horses' hoofs rustled in masses of the stiff, dry little leaves.

Golf players were on the club links, moving along in pairs and groups, stopping to shout "Happy New Year" and wave at the riders. Luncheon at the club, where wood fires blazed, and a constant joyous clatter of voices was heard, was really late breakfast, with sausages and waffles and a silver pot of coffee.

Everyone was in sporting clothes; there was no formality. When Jane came in, she carried her gold-mounted crop, and stood for a while at the fireplace, the centre of a spirited group, looking with amusement and appreciation at the faces about her, sometimes raising a questioning eyebrow, sometimes touching her boot with the little leather loop of her whip.

But she was oddly silent. It all seemed like a dream to-day, a dream that might dissolve, like Cinderella's ball, to find her flying out of the palace in the old rags again.

She was not consciously frightened now. But she felt herself an actress in a familiar part; the indifferent glances, the little French expressions, the casual acceptance of their adulation, were quite conscious, to-day. How little it mat-

tered, after all, whether she were here or somewhere else! One lived—that was all. The adoring girls, paying court to her, imitating her, circling eagerly about the lovely, the admired, the imitated and envied Mrs. Chatterton—how utterly unimportant they were!

Twenty years of hard, slow climbing, to stand here at the country club, in her riding breeches, listening and smiling! She asked herself if it was worth it, and had to answer No. But then what *was* worth anything? It had all been agreeable enough, exciting, entertaining enough.

Jane remembered, on just such a sunshiny afternoon, now more than twenty years past, that she had gone with her mother to see a modest little neighbourhood doctor. Mrs. Davis had known what her illness was, she had gone merely for professional confirmation and had received it.

To-day, at the club, suddenly the daughter who had accompanied her recalled the scene. The doctor's neat, ugly little office. The medical books and the artificial begonia. The glass cases of instruments.

"What about an operation, doctor?" Mrs. Davis, plain, meek, sixty, had asked.

"I don't think I would advise an operation."

"You wouldn't advise one?"

"I think not."

"You mean that an operation should have been done some time ago?"

"Well, yes. It is extremely doubtful, however, if we could have arrested it."

So—there was nothing to do but die. Jane had looked at her mother curiously, respectfully, as they stepped out into the sunshine again. What did one see, in busy Valencia Street, knowing that one was close to death? What did street cars, vegetable stands, photographers' doorways, seem, seen through that new light, or darkness?

Well, she could imagine to-day. She could imagine that,

on that long ago winter morning, her mother's point of view had suffered the same odd change, had become bright, unreal, far away. Familiar voices had, perhaps, sounded strange, familiar activities appeared so much utter nonsense—baby-play—busy work. . . .

"Jane, dearest——"

"Mollie——"

"Any chance of your being in Biarritz in July?"

"Oh, an excellent chance! You're not going?"

"We hope to. Jane, tell me this frankly, is Mr. Chatterton at all likely to be sent to Spain?"

"Sent——?"

"You know exactly what I mean! If Babcock gets in ——"

"Oh?" Two girls, watching her shyly, thought that there was never anything in the world so charming, so finished and languid and amused, as the way Mrs. Chatterton could snub one with her "Oh." "If he were," she said, smiling a little as if at her own thoughts, "you would hardly expect me to begin my diplomatic career with the indiscretion of mentioning it!"

"Mrs. Chatterton, are you going to be on my committee?"

"Mrs. Langley, I'm quite too sorry, but I'm afraid I shall not be here!"

"But I may use your name?"

A lazy movement of the brown eyes. They were slightly narrowed.

"Mrs. Langley, if you are driven to use the names of absentees, of course you may have mine!"

And then the greatest lady of them all, the imperious Mrs. Hamilton who was Jane's closest friend:

"Jenny, do you know my darling old mother took a tremendous fancy to that cream-coloured shawl you were wearing the other night, and I haven't the slightest idea where to look for one like it!"

And Jane, friendly, informal, affectionate:

"There isn't one like it. But you tell her that a woman who loves her will be prouder than she ever was in her life before if she'll accept it and sometimes wear it!"

Leisurely breakfast; much chatter, many cigarettes. And then, in the cool, brief afternoon, bridge in the game room, one's beauty unquestionable, one's husband all devotion, one's life ideal, even one's luck invincible on New Year's Day.

"If she sails to Manila—if Billy really has no fancy for her at all—if the weeks begin to go by and we pack for Washington, for Europe——" ran her thoughts. "It must be so, it shall be so! Nothing to be frightened about, no harm done. I must keep cool, that's all—I mustn't lose my head—even with Kent, I mustn't be too frank——"

"Your bid, Jane."

"I beg your pardon! I was miles away. . . ."

CHAPTER XII

JUANITA, in the quiet of the deserted house, as the dull afternoon hours wore on, went quietly downstairs, quietly peeping in that door and this, in search of Kent. She found him idling over the papers, in the library.

"You're going walking, eh?" he asked, with a suggestion of a stretch and a suggestion of a yawn. For Juanita wore her belted coat, a small hat well pulled down, and her shabby little gloves. "Wait a minute," he added, "I'll go with you. I've been indoors all day!"

So they let themselves out at a side door and walked about the curve of the drive and toward the hills. Everything seemed deserted to-day; horses stood silent in the paddock, their necks resting on the upper bar; an old stableman was smoking in one of the long granite arches of the stables, bare vines etched on the stone walls about him like spider-webs.

The air was heavy, sweet and chill. The sun had gone behind a bank of softly approaching fog from the west, everything looked bare and neat in the dull, even light.

They mounted toward the low range of the hills; the ground fell away behind them, and they could look down upon the massed roofs and chimneys of the house. The paths were raked, shrubs and rose bushes were neatly roped, like faggots, the berry bushes and grapevines spread bare and dry upon their frames, like the skeletons of things crucified.

But presently the garden was gone, they were crossing the orchard toward the woods. Rough clods, turned under the

leafless trees, still wore a powdering of frost upon their shady side. There was a sharp tingling sweetness in the air, a smell of earth and rotting leaves, and bark, and wet foliage. Juanita drank it in joyously, breathing deep, eagerly facing the low, rounded rise of the hills, where the great blanket of sea fog was sweeping solemnly in, enveloping the sprawling oaks, veiling the world in gray shadows, pearl shadows, white shadows.

"I want to ask you something," she said, when they were on a deep-rutted, long-deserted road that lay like a shelf along the gradual slope of the hills. "Mrs. Chatterton wants me to go to Manila, to start a week from to-morrow. Would you go?"

The simplicity of the little question made him smile—the kindly, dark smile that so brightened his face.

"Would you like to go, Juanita?"

His voice shook her heart. The exquisite happiness of walking slowly here beside him, talking to him so easily, knowing him to be her friend, made it difficult for her to answer intelligently.

"Well, I suppose so," she said, with a sidewise, questioning smile. "Wouldn't *you?*"

"So much so," he answered, "that if you do go, I'll probably follow. I've been almost long enough in one place. And that reminds me, I sent a Christmas gift this year, and I have had a New Year's gift in return," he said. He fumbled in his pocket, and Juanita looked at him expectantly.

"I wrote my mother," he said, "for Christmas."

The girl's face was radiant.

"Oh, Kent—I'm so glad! Was she delighted?"

"I think she was. Anyway, I got this telegram to-day." He opened the yellow sheet. Juanita looked at his face, looked down at it eagerly.

"My darling, God bless you. You have given us all a happy New Year," she read. "Oh, Kent," Juanita said,

looking up happily, "isn't that wonderful! And she signs it, 'Mother'," she added, reading it again. "Kent, why did you write?"

"I don't know," he answered unencouragingly, putting away the message. "You do one thing in one mood, another in another." And he walked along in silence for a moment. "Well, about Manila?" he asked.

"But don't you see," the girl said vivaciously, "that Mrs. Chatterton is trying to get rid of me, just as I said she was, this morning!"

"Well," Kent commented lazily, "what of it?"

"What *of* it?" Juanita echoed in astonishment.

"Yes. If it means a wonderful trip for you, it seems to me I'd take it."

"You would?" Her voice fell a little blankly, in disappointment.

"Well, wouldn't it be a great experience? What good is there in staying here, if she doesn't want you?"

"But that's just *it*. Why doesn't she want me?"

"Oh, I don't know, she might have a score of reasons," the man surmised idly.

"You mean," Juanita summarized it, after a brief pause, during which they had walked along on the crisped oak leaves and hard muddy ruts, "that you would bundle off at a day's notice, to be gone—*months?*"

"Isn't that the way to do things?" he countered.

"I suppose it is," she agreed a little discontentedly, after a pause.

They were walking rather fast now, upon a chance down grade, and Kent saw that her cheeks were hot like those of a child, the damp gold hair caught up in flyaway wisps against her rough small hat, her coat fallen open, her hands in her pockets, her whole aspect deliciously young and earnest and sweet.

The effect of her presence had troubled him strangely,

before this; he felt it more strongly now than he had ever felt it. When he was with her, he had an odd sense of freedom, cleanness, simplicity. The unhappy heaviness of what he felt for the other woman, an emotion that had never been mixed with anything so definite as hope, with any constructive or confident feeling whatsoever, seemed to blow away here; the fragrances that were of beautiful drawing rooms, of boudoirs, the shine of soft lamps and jewels, the shimmer of exquisite gowns, and the cadences of a low, trained, thoroughly self-conscious voice, all vanished.

Instead he found himself looking at the world through the eyes of healthy girlhood. Walking here beside her, on this quiet, foggy, cool New Year's Day, he imagined that life had suddenly become simple, that he and she were married, roaming the oak woods for the hour before dinner, presently to go into some low-browed doorway—the old hacienda, for choice, to chatter over the washing of hands, over the serving of soup.

Wonderful thing, a girl, Kent mused, eyeing the fine, strong young wrist, the slim ankle in its brown wool stocking, the soft cap of gold hair under her little hat, the clean line of jaw, the clear wide-open eye. A good woman, a normal, sensible, sweet woman was a pretty thing to see, in the making, he thought. Nothing spoiled here, nothing subtle or surfeited. Everything ahead, everything to hope and to expect from such a girl as this.

He thought of himself as a writer, with one of the old rooms in the hacienda cleaned out for his workshop. There would be a healthy clatter, heard below stairs, wherever Juanita happened to be—servants, bawling calves, kittens, dogs, perhaps some day small insistent children stumbling and protesting and catching their breath in baby laughter.

A writer—supposing himself to be really a writer, supposing the book of newspaper sketches upon which he was working might find a publisher—would be in an enchanting environ-

ment, so placed. Books, horses, and a garden, with the autumn sunset slanting red among the old farm buildings, or the apple blossoms snowy against a dubious, soft, gray spring sky. And always with the sea booming, splintering, swelling on the shore below the cliffs.

Even all that would be nothing, of course, without this companionable, eager, simple girl, wise in her own way, gay and friendly, intelligent, responsive, beautifully and finely made. He liked everything about her, the slender rounded arms, the bright, flyaway hair, the firm, squarely set little shoes and slim ankles, the texture of her white skin, her oddly dark eyebrows above the earnest blue of her eyes. Life had never before brought him a friend like her, a person whose quick comment, flashing smiles, sudden seriousness, upon every conceivable topic of conversation, seemed so valuable and so true. She wore her brown belted coat like a child, her little mashed hat, her shabby little sturdy gloves were childish, too. But the heart, the quick mind, the sensitive soul, belonged to a woman.

The mental, or spiritual, processes by which a man transfers his allegiance from one woman to another woman totally dissimilar were active in Kent, although he was unconscious of them. It was a habit now to find himself dreaming of Jane, the superb, the fragrant, the invincible and unattainable. She was, obviously, a woman for men to desire; she expected it, and they accorded it. She lived in an atmosphere of beauty-making, creating of her own lovely self a continual picture, every jewel on her white hand, every tone in her haunting voice, a studied, perfected thing. The books Jane read, the plays and poems and operas about which she talked, her little affectations of languages, of cults, were all a part of that intense self-culture that had produced her.

Perhaps she did not give much. She took; she drew from all their sources the accessories of her beauty, her ego, and she made of them something that few men could resist. He

had seen them go down before her, men who knew only pompous old Chatterton in a business way, and who stared bewildered at the radiant, winning beauty who was his wife. A wife, too, who had given him a son, who knew everybody, everything, sitting down indifferently at piano or bridge table, breaking easily into any one of at least four languages, interested in the political and social policy of the big newspaper. Kent was only now coming to see that all these were accessories, too, things she had acquired as deliberately as she acquired her hats, to make Jane Chatterton a success.

Juanita, on the other hand, gave herself no such prominence in her own scheme. To dress herself effectively and to pose would have seemed to her not only affected but dull. She was living too vitally, developing too fast, to stop to consider exactly what anyone thought about her.

Yet already Kent found himself thinking a good deal about her, wondering what she would say, interested in her fresh, honest point of view. He found himself anticipating the early Sunday morning walk to church with a surprising little glow at his heart. And to-day he told himself that he would miss her if she went away.

It was a happy prospect for any girl, though, the long, bright days at sea, steaming quietly toward all the jumble of smells and colours, sounds and sights of the Orient. It was evidently a solution for Jane, too—whatever the mystery; Jane did not want the younger woman in her path.

So he encouraged her idly, and dwelt, with a quite conscious quickening of his own determination, upon the possibility of his seeing her in Manila.

"But why," she asked curiously and incredulously, "why should you come, Kent?"

"Well, why not? I've always wanted to go to Japan—India. I've never been."

"But your job?"

"Yes, I know. But I'm not crazy about this job. I think

I may go home and see my mother, and then cruise my way down to Nagasaki."

"And where is your mother?"

"Baltimore."

"Oh!" She pondered, walking downhill now, with the stately spreading roofs and porches of the Chatterton mansion just visible below them in the rapidly vanishing light.

"I'll be done with Chatterton pretty soon," Kent said. "I suppose you know what my job is?"

"Secretary, isn't it?"

"Well, in a way. But what I'm really doing is helping the old man get everything in line for the new *Sun* building. I see the architect, and I get his ideas, and then talk it all over with Chatterton. The main trouble," Kent added, "is clearing the titles of property. The *Sun*—which really is Mr. Chatterton—owns a lot of property in Mission Street; they want to put a block-square newspaper building there, and they have every piece of property in the block except two, and one of those an estate is holding up and we have an option. The other piece, a key lot, worth—oh, I suppose sixty or seventy thousand—hasn't a clear title. The idea is for me to clear that title without letting the *Star* men find out what we're about. Some of the property is improved now, most of the lots have stood vacant since the big fire. Chatterton's going to put a million-dollar building there."

"Where are the *Sun* offices now, Kent?"

"Down in some sheds, in the north end of Sansome Street—awful places, tumbling down. The art department is on the top of an ice house, Sunday rooms in an old loft, and so on. I merely had a job on the paper, I was drifting along, not particularly interested, when the City Editor sent for me one morning, and they asked me to sit in at this directors' meeting—they were discussing the new building. They want to own every inch of that block before anyone knows what they're about. And that's why my job is, in a

way, confidential. I've hunted up widows with half interests and heirs under age—you never saw such a mess. Now, since —oh, well, for three months maybe, I've been on the track of one man—the fellow that owns this last lot—and when I get hold of him I'll be done.'"

"And when will that be?" she asked innocently.

"Well, any time, now. The property was left to him in a will, by an old fellow who died in San Francisco some time ago, Jim Choate. The thing is to find him. The chances of the *Star* people finding him first are slim, and at the same time, it would be darned awkward for the *Sun* if old Ross, who owns the *Star*, got hold of that corner lot."

"Why, what could he do, Kent?" the girl asked.

"Oh, some sort of spite work. He could hold the lot for a terrible sum and threaten to put a glue factory or a half-hour whistle on it. Or he could put a Turkish bath there—in any case, to have that angle cutting right into our property would ruin the building."

"And suppose this man who inherited the property won't sell?"

"Oh, he'll sell fast enough," Kent assured her. "if we can find him. And the funny thing is," he added, "that it was in Mr. Chatterton's house, and most unexpectedly, that I ran across a clue to him!"

"How could you?" Juanita asked, with a serious incredulous look.

"Well, I did. I was going through some of the storerooms, upstairs and at the back, to overlook the men when they were storing some old engravings. You know the old man is rather cracked about engravings, and he's got books of them there. Well, I was wandering about, and I got to turning over any quantity of old music—old books of bound songs, you know—some of them funny. I was glancing through them when I saw my man's name—written on a flyleaf."

"Why, how *could* you!" Juanita asked again amazedly.

"Well, that was just it. How *could* I? I puzzled over it, and worried over it, and tried to work it out. So I did a little investigating, and found out that those books had been Mrs. Chatterton's—belonged in her family, anyway. Either she knew this man before she was married, or in some way she got hold of a piece of music belonging to him. Funny, wasn't it?"

"*Funny!* Did you ask her?"

"No, I didn't, not directly. It was just before she left for Washington, last fall. But I brought the man's name into a conversation, to try out the old man, and I took care that she heard me. Knowing that this fellow must have sung—for there was his name on the music—I asked old Chatterton if he had ever heard the name of such-and-such a singer. He said no, and he wasn't acting, either. She glanced over from her book—it was in the library, last September, I guess, and said sort of carelessly, 'Where did *you* hear that name?' I said I happened to see it on an old book of music, upstairs, when we were storing the engravings, and she shrugged, as if she had lost interest in it, and that was all there was of that."

"Isn't she mysterious, Kent?" Juanita asked, almost admiringly.

"Lots of women are, I suppose. I mean, they have secrets, don't they?" he asked, so doubtfully, so youthfully, that Juanita laughed at him delightedly. "Take these Western families," Kent pursued, "there isn't one of them that hasn't its secret. This one, some horrible early days' scandal; that one, an irregular marriage. It isn't always bodies buried in the cellar, I suppose, and hidden gold, but it seems to be always there."

"Why shouldn't she be frank?" Juanita mused, a little impatiently.

"It's my opinion that most women like to play a lone hand," Kent offered. "There seems to be so much more safety in keeping everything dark."

"I suppose so," the girl conceded thoughtfully. "But I am just as sure now as I was last night that she is the woman who came down to see my mother last fall," she added, with sudden conviction. "Of course, her affairs are her own business. And, of course, she can send me away—and she is most generous to arrange it as she has. But *why?*" she demanded pathetically.

"She denied that, did she?"

"Oh, absolutely. She had never heard of Solito, nor of my mother, nor anything!"

"And I suppose it has occurred to you," Kent asked, in his kind, lazy voice, "that if you had *seen* her there, then, spoken to her, and she chose to deny it now, you would be no better off than you are this minute?"

Her eyes, luminous in the twilight, met his with a little reluctant frown.

"Yes, I suppose so," she conceded thoughtfully. "Yes, of course, that's so. But there is such a thing as truth in the world, Kent," she added, with a little wistful glance.

"Yes. But one might put the happiness and safety of those one loved—I'm all mixed up in that cursed third person, but you know what I mean," Kent said. "You can't always tell the flat truth. You don't want to."

"*She* mightn't," Juanita conceded ungraciously.

"Has it occurred to you," he pursued, "that this might easily be the explanation? The Señora bears a child—not her husband's child, and goes to her closest friend, Jenny Davis, and tells her about it, and asks this friend to send that child down to the rancho, a few weeks later, to be brought up as a foster daughter?"

Juanita had stopped walking and was facing him now, with reddened cheeks and troubled, rebellious eyes.

"But, my mother—the Señora—was married!" she said a little awkwardly.

"This is merely a hypothesis," Kent went on. "I am merely supposing that some trouble you don't know about came to her. True, she was married. But it might have been that her husband was away—that he would know this child was not his."

"Ah, you didn't know her!" the girl said, with an angry laugh.

"No, I didn't, of course. But you must suspect that *something* was irregular, Juanita," Kent said sensibly, "when you find yourself disinherited—with a pretty strong hint that you are not an Espinosa at all! In such a case, you can easily see that Mrs. Chatterton would not want to distress you," he said. "And yet, the thought of Billy might make her, as a good mother, uneasy. She doesn't want him to fall in love with anybody—yet. She knows that some love affair, or some tragedy, perhaps, came to the Señora. She never has mentioned it, she won't mention it now. But when, by the most extraordinary coincidence, she finds you in her house, she does exactly what one would expect—takes steps to get you out of the way and yet promises to stand your friend."

"*You* think she was that woman who came down," Juanita said accusingly. "I can tell you do!"

"Yes," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "I think she was."

"And that she won't admit it?"

"And that she sees nothing to be gained by admitting it."

For a few seconds Juanita looked stunned. She had won her hard-fought point, to find that it brought her no gain at all. She shrugged her shoulders despairingly, and began to walk slowly toward the house.

The garden was almost dark now; tunnels of bright light shone boldly out from the service region, and between the

almost-drawn curtains that were the library they could see a soft pink glow. The kitchen lights touched the shrubs and bushes and enamelled the leaves in glittering twinkles of light. A strong smell of fresh-ground coffee came about the well-groomed box and laurel trees. The early night air was cold and heavy.

"You think I am making too much of this whole thing, Kent," Juanita suggested rather than asked, a little hurt.

"Well, yes, in a way, I do," he answered frankly. "I can't see why you don't just forget it and go on your way rejoicing. Surely it isn't every girl who has a trip to Manila thrown in her way. If Mrs. Chatterton, for some reason, can't be frank, why harass her about it?"

"You're quite right," she said quickly, with a little shame.

"It almost seems to me," Kent added, with a kindly, sidewise smile, "that I would say to myself, if not actually to her, that the way of the least resistance is the sensible way, for the present."

They were at the ivy-framed side door, a little door in a Norman arch, through which Juanita often slipped in her comings and goings. She glanced up at the bulk of the big stone walls that rose so imposingly above it, the mellowed lights that shone out from deep-set windows here and there, the impression of solid and permanent power and beauty that they gave in the winter dusk, and a sense of her own utter unimportance amused her suddenly.

"I think that is good advice," she said, with a sigh of relief. "I am going to Mrs. Chatterton, at six, with her mail. And shall I say that of course I'll go with Mrs. Coleman, and be glad to go?"

"I would," he approved, standing close to her, a step below her, for she had mounted the single great stone that formed the threshold.

"Just give up the whole search and mystery and everything else," she mused.

"Well, something may turn up some day. Meanwhile, wouldn't you be happier?"

"Perhaps."

"You sail——?" he asked slowly.

The girl laughed delightedly.

"It sounds thrilling!" she confessed. "A week from to-morrow."

"Before that time—say, next Sunday, when the Chattertons will be away," Kent asked suddenly, "would you go on a picnic with me? There's a roadster here I can use. How about it?"

Her heart was beating fast with happiness.

"I'd love it."

"All right, then, I'll arrange it. A sort of good-bye party. Juanita——" Kent said, and paused.

"Kent?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said confusedly, almost roughly. "You have no idea——" he began, and stopped again. "Nothing! No matter," he repeated. "Except that—I'll be sorry to have you go. And I hope it will be a wonderful time for you."

Darkness had fallen; the garden behind him was black and chill. But Juanita had opened the door and was silhouetted against rosy warmth and light.

"Oh, thank you," she said, her voice trembling a little.

"You may find the man you're hunting for as well in Manila as anywhere," he added, delaying her.

"I suppose so. I suppose so! I didn't think of that. And you," she said, smiling, "you might find the man that Mission Street property was willed to—you might find *your* man there, too! Honolulu, or Manila, Japan, for both of us, may be the Port of Missing Men!"

"Wait a minute," Kent said, "no hurry!" For she was turning away. "If I find my man and come out to Manila, shall you be glad to see me?" he asked, in an odd sort of voice.

He was surprised to find himself holding her here, for these awkward boyish inanities, yet oddly, strangely unwilling to have her go. "So we go on a picnic Sunday?" he added, before she could answer.

"It would be lovely," she agreed, a little touched, a little bewildered at his manner.

"And you'll write to me?"

"And you to me!" she said eagerly, by way of answer. "To tell me if you find your man."

"Oh, I'll find him, and clean the whole thing up," Kent said carelessly. "You know," he added, "old Choate, who left him the property, had two married daughters in the East, and if this fellow doesn't show up pretty soon, they're going to petition the courts to declare him legally dead and sell the property, anyway!"

"Funny," she said, amused, and off guard, "that you are hunting a man, and I am hunting a man! We both have our Sidney Fitzroys!"

"Our *what?*" he asked sharply. "Where'd *you* get that name?"

"That," she answered blankly, "—*is* the name."

"Is what name?" he exclaimed.

"Why, the name of the man my mother told me to find, Kent. The man I've been talking about!" She trembled a little, involuntarily laid a hand on his sleeve. "Why, do you know it?" she asked.

"Know it!" he echoed. And for a second, staring at her in stupefaction, he was still. "That's the man I'm looking for, too," he said, then. "The man whose name was on the music book, here in this house. I guess we're on the same trail, Juanita. Perhaps we'd better stick together and hunt down this Sidney Fitzroy!"

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS strange to Juanita that, even in the light of this stupendous discovery, this amazing experience, nothing immediate happened. Her mysterious man and Kent's mysterious man, blended into one and the same "Sidney Fitzroy," and discussed from these new angles, was still as entirely undiscovered as he had been yesterday—there was nothing to do about him except go on searching.

Kent, after the happy intimacy of the New Year's Day walk, seemed oddly to escape Juanita. Mrs. Chatterton, muffled to the eyes in beautiful loose furs, had to go into town on the day following, and took him along, to attend to some business for her husband, and Juanita missed both of them, missed Billy, and had a day quiet almost to moping: writing letters, walking alone in the cold lonely garden, playing cribbage with the old man.

On Saturday, Kent was back again, but unresponsive and inaccessible. More than once Juanita caught glimpses of him, apparently without attracting his interest, and at four o'clock she was crossing the hall when they met squarely.

"Another walk?" he asked, without smiling. For she had on her coat and hat.

"Just for fifteen minutes. I feel so stuffy, indoors all day. You couldn't come, too?"

"Nope," he said briefly. And without explanation he went on his way. He had been playing billiards with Mr. and Mrs. Chatterton in the library; Juanita, hot-cheeked, hurt, going out the door, heard somebody call to him that he was dealer.

"Rude! Rude," the girl said to herself, feeling that she

hated him, not only for being so, but for holding such power to humiliate her. She tried to shake off the impression, to think of other things. No use. For all her brisk walking, facing the cold wind, and trying to forget him, the sense of injustice and rebuff persisted, and she went off to sleep that night determining that there would be no talk of a picnic the next day and that she would snub him if he suggested it.

He did not join her on her walk to church, early the next morning. And Juanita told herself that she was glad. Her trip to the Philippines was settled now, she was to go up to town on Tuesday, another day or two would see her beginning new fortunes in new surroundings.

Only, she thought, burying her face in her hands as she prayed, she wished that he had not talked about a picnic to-day. It was an exquisite day, one of those strange warm days in a Western winter that are more springlike than the spring. Evidently, some men just said things, carelessly, to please a passing mood.

It was a little daunting to get back to the house, at eight o'clock, just as the sun rose gloriously warm and bright, to find him seated at the side door, in the roadster, with a lunch box packed and neatly strapped on behind, and a heavy plaid flung carelessly into the seat beside him.

"Oh," she said, happiness creeping into her voice in spite of herself, "are we going?"

"Well, aren't we?" he asked, frowning.

Juanita hesitated, deep joy in her heart. Everything else was forgotten except that he had remembered the picnic. She was to have this day with him, after all. In his funny, dark, silent way he had cared enough to get the car and the luncheon, and here he was, in the early sweet morning, waiting.

She looked at the seat beside him. Kent, who was wrapped in a big coat and half hidden behind the morning newspaper, asked abruptly:

"Had your breakfast?"

"Well—no," she admitted, with a wretched little prick of feeling that she never acted reasonably when she was with Kent.

"Then go in and get it," he said. "I'll wait!" And Juanita ran upstairs for her coffee with a singing heart, threw down her prayer book, pulled on a more comfortable hat, and had joined him again in little more than ten minutes.

This time he smiled approval, folded his newspaper and put it in his pocket, leisurely pulled on his heavy gloves, and when Juanita, quite speechless with felicity, had established herself in the luxurious front seat that was like a deep, tipped chair, he came about to her side of the car, and tucked the rug firmly about her with big, capable hands.

The engine raced; settled. They were off. A sweep about the drive, a smooth mile between familiar fences and gardens, and then they were out upon strange roads, and every minute was adventure and ecstasy to Juanita.

The cool air smote her face and blew the tendrils of her bright hair up against her hat, but she felt deliciously warm, wrapped snugly in the big plaid, and her eyes, missing not an inch of the bare winter roads, danced with delight, like two blue stars.

Chilly at half-past eight, with the sun still so low that the car's shadow lay on the road, to the west, yet it was going to be a golden day. Barns steamed, chimneys sent gray plumes of smoke into the drying, brightening air. The road was muddy, there were wide pools from the rains, across whose brown surfaces the white clouds moved. Everything was stretching, opening, spreading under the wash of the first red light. The sun mounted, whitened; a train, sending a long sorrowful cry across the fields and orchards, throbbed its way south; cocks crowed triumphantly, and horses, galloping in a field, flung up great green-tipped clods from their clumping heels.

Kent rarely spoke, but she fancied, as he drove rapidly and skilfully southward, that he liked this adventure as thoroughly as she did. Through last year's dirty, crushed brown grass, on the sheltered side of tree stumps and fence posts, fresh green was already bursting, and the fruit trees sent their lacy, bared shadows like cobwebs across the turned rich brown of the earth. A sense of singing, of shining and rejoicing, possessed the land. More than once, whirling up dizzily into the heartening sunshine, they heard the liquid, heart-reaching song of the meadow lark.

"Kent, do you smell that?" Juanita asked, as they passed a line of shabby, low brown barns, where the black mud was churned deep by the feet of the wandering, huddling, staring red cattle. "Was there ever a smell in the world like the smell of a milk ranch?"

"Did you ever hear it said that the Goddess of Memory was a person one could always lead around by the nose?" Kent asked, with a sidewise glance.

She liked the idea, and fell into a thoughtful elaboration of it.

"That's true, isn't it? Lilac, for instance. When I first smell lilac, it always makes me feel about six years old, in a stiff clean dress, in our garden. And oranges—do you know what oranges always make me think of? When I was sick, years ago, and Mother'd come into the room peeling one for me, and I'd smell that clean, clean smell, over the cough medicine and milk toast and the wood fire——"

"The smell of certain baked potatoes," Kent added, after a while, "not all, but certain ones, take me back as nothing else in the world does! My mother had theories about cream, for children, instead of butter and milk, in baked potatoes. To this day, if I put cream in one, I can remember my mother. She'd come in and ask Loody—Loody was what we kids called the nurse, her name was Louisa—whether we surely had cream in our baked potatoes."

It presented a picture rather different from what Juanita's thoughts of his childhood had been. Cream, and a nurse—she had fancied his might have been rather humbler beginnings.

"You had a sister, Kent?"

"And a brother."

"And you were the oldest."

"Two years older than my brother, eight than my sister."

"And what are their names?"

"Warren—Cyrus Warren—is my brother's name. And my sister is Mary Stuart—Mimsie, Mother called her. Warren's thirty now, and married, and has four kids; Mimsie's married, too, and has a baby."

"And you've never seen them?"

He drove for perhaps half a mile in silence. Then he asked, in an unencouraging tone:

"Seen whom?"

"The babies," Juanita answered calmly.

"Oh?" he asked. "Oh, no," he added, more mildly.

"I thought," Juanita presently suggested frankly, "that your family was poor."

"On the contrary," he remarked drily.

In the silence that followed, she readjusted her thoughts to Kent's position as a rich man's son. It made his desertion of the family less blameworthy, she thought, yet, in a way, sadder. Rich parents, who were able to do everything in the world for their children, must feel so much worse, Juanita reflected, upon realizing that their everything still is not enough.

"I should think," she offered rather timidly, when they had sped through several miles of lovely countryside in silence, "I should think you could hardly resist the temptation to go back to them—to see them all and straighten it all out!"

"While you are in Manila," he answered unexpectedly, "I think I may."

A sudden unreasonable happiness flooded her heart and she asked:

"But what has my being in Manila to do with it?"

"Well," he answered, after a noticeable pause, "possibly a good deal."

Juanita sat silent, hardly daring to breathe.

"You don't know what I mean," the man said presently, in a half-serious tone, "and, but for one thing, I'd tell you. One thing," he added, "that makes me feel I can't."

The girl was listening, breathing a little hard.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that there is a woman——"

The world went black about Juanita and she felt cold and sick. She was glad that she need not move. Her eyes, surprised, stricken, met his quick glance.

"That you love?" she asked quickly.

"I suppose it might be called that," he admitted.

Juanita's every faculty seemed to be engaged in not betraying the utter confusion and pain that were whirling in her heart.

"Are you"—she tried to ask the question with the conventional cheerfulness—"are you engaged?"

"Engaged?" he asked sharply. "No. And never will be. When I say that there is a woman, I mean only that I admire her—she fascinates me, she has done so for a long time. I can never hope—anything. And yet, such a feeling—such a feeling," he added, "has a curious effect upon one. It seems to drain the vitality out of other relationships, out of life, generally. One wishes it had never been—and yet one cannot imagine living at all without it."

To this Juanita seemed to find nothing to say. The strangeness of so forceful a personality as his being daunted by any woman's indifference or inaccessibility seemed to take the matter out of the zone of her comprehension entirely. She knew that he was talking as much to himself as to her, and she made no comment.

"The influence of a woman upon a man is something entirely incalculable," Kent presently added thoughtfully.

"It isn't that woman you liked—the woman your family objected to, so many years ago?" she hazarded.

"Hattie? Oh, no. I've not seen her since that time," he went on, as if glad to have the conversation switched into grooves so much less difficult. "I broke away from home, just after that, with a sort of spring fever. I wanted to plunge into newspaper life, theatrical life, studios late at night, adventure of all sorts—the things that look so fascinating to young fellows, from the outside. Bohemia. Liberty. Self-expression. You know the phraseology. Hundreds of kids fling themselves into it every year, perhaps to find," he ended, in a lighter tone, "as I did, that Mother was right.

"The most surprising feature about my own experiences was to discover that my mother *was* right, about—well, everything," Kent presently added. "My mother was—is—old-fashioned, you know. She is the sort that changes the upper sheet every Monday, and has clergymen in to dinner, and a coal fire in the library, and our pictures taken all together for my father's birthday——"

"It sounds lovely to me!" Juanita said, in a longing burst.

"Well, in a way, it was," Kent admitted. "I see that now. My mother always kept the same servants, went to see their mothers in the hospital—that sort of thing. She took us to the same place, up in Maine, for twenty years, and bought us tennis rackets and brown khaki clothes and cameras and sunburn medicine, and she told us that 'little gentlemen'—'little ladies'—'nice people'—did this and that. We were, of course, the only family alive," he ended, with the hint of a smile.

"Do you mean she was a snob?" Juanita asked hesitatingly.

"My mother? My Lord, no! Mother's American, the finest sort. Plain clothes, plain food, interested in everybody

and everything—it's her sort of snobbishness not to be snobbish, if anything, in any way!" Kent elucidated.

"I've been thinking that your people were different—humbler," Juanita admitted.

The man made no comment.

"I see now that there is a lot in all that," he resumed, after a pause filled with morning sweetness and bird songs; "there's a lot in clean linen, and bread baked at home, and letters written, and good books discussed. I see now that the reason my mother wouldn't talk to poor little Hattie—the girl I wanted to marry—wasn't because Hat worked in a candy store, but because she was a little hypocrite and a liar. Mother saw it—I couldn't. The whole thing suffocated me. My sister with her teeth in gold straps, studying French, and taking riding lessons, my father writing political editorials for the morning papers, my mother pouring tea for a lot of D. A. R.'s——"

"What are dars?" Juanita asked innocently.

"Old girls who belong to historical clubs, is what I meant—it sickened me. I said, 'I'll get out! I'll get among real people who are suffering and working and creating and enjoying life!' And I—quit," Kent finished simply. He had turned the car to the south, outside of Santa Cruz, and they were running down the flat cliff road, with the ocean, sparkling and blue, on their right.

"I didn't know your family had servants, and went away for the summer, and all that," Juanita, struck, girl-fashion, with this aspect, mused. And then, with sudden animation, she added: "Oh, we could have made the rancho to-day—we could have made the rancho, if we had only thought, if we had started earlier! Oh, why—*why* didn't we think of it!"

"Why," Kent said, with his kindest smile, "why, where do you think we are going?"

"Not down as far as Solito!" she said, almost in a scream.

"But of *course*," he answered.

For a few seconds delight overwhelmed her, and he saw her clasp her hands, writhe in her seat like an ecstatic child, and finally bury her face.

"Oh, but I *love* you for that!" he heard her half whisper. And when she faced him again, although she was smiling, her blue eyes were wet. "Kent," she said, "to see the old house, and talk to Lola—oh, but I can't believe it! Why didn't you *tell* me?"

"Waiting for this, maybe," he said. And although the tone was only his usual dry, indifferent one and he did not smile, the happy blood rushed into her face.

"Well, and did you find thrills, and real people, and—and what you went after?" the girl reverted presently.

"I found work," he answered. "And I found plenty of screaming and excitement, girls jumping on tables, men drinking too much and cursing the government, all of them holding that what my mother thought sacred was sentimental stupidity, and what my mother thought disgusting was freedom. I saw girls throwing themselves away on married men of forty, and thinking it was merely daring, and old women reddening their mouths to kiss kids not yet out of college——"

"Ah, don't!" Juanita said sharply.

"Well——" he conceded, and was silent.

"They're not all like that?" the girl questioned.

"Oh, no. But the real thing is always the real thing, Juanita," Kent said, "and you can't walk in, a stranger, and get hold of it. I've seen newspaper men, geniuses, men the world will hear from some day, but they were the sort that took home a pound of chopped meat and wheeled the baby out Sunday morning. I saw a girl once, a Dane, taking care of a painter whose wife wouldn't divorce him, washing his

shirts, bearing him children—but it wasn't in Greenwich Village, and it wasn't on Russian Hill!

"The real Romance," he mused, "belongs as much to a woman like my mother as to the most daring ménage that ever flourished in the little streets around the Luxembourg! It's simply—the real people. Whatever they are, whatever they do, if they're honest—that's romance, life, thrills, and nothing else is!"

"That's what one wants to be," Juanita, as if to herself, said fervently.

"You don't find life, Juanita," the man said, after a silence. "You make it. The earlier you can realize what that means, the luckier you are!"

And for a while they both were silent, while the car purred its way through the sparse new greenness, the sweep of the rain-packed roads, the air that was freshening, freshening, now, with the first breath of the sea.

It was one of a girl's perfect days, one of those times that seem too rich, too marvellously satisfying to belong to the routine of life. To recognize the landmarks they presently reached, to catch a first glimpse of the weather-stained great walls of the old Mission, to seize, with trembling fingers, the edges of the seat beneath her, and look with swimming eyes at the Amigos running swollen and high, at the willows, the eucalyptus trees—at last at the barns and paddocks and fences, the stooping peppers, the sleepy, sunshiny roof where the old pigeons walked in busy circles, the hacienda set against a background of dancing, sun-flooded sea, was to feel her heart bursting with pain that was all joy, and joy that brimmed her eyes with tears.

Kent brought her to it all with an odd air of quiet satisfaction, immediately obliterating himself, making of himself merely a sympathetic witness to her welcome and her delight. She was out of the car almost before it was stopped, her voice

ringing out over the quiet barnyard. It was noon; there were no shadows, the cows were far away on the hills. A cat sneaked about the chicken pens, sheep looked up from empty mangers.

But two or three mongrel dogs came out barking and sniffing, and she was in the centre of their leaping and licking ranks, bent over to caress them, laughing, naming them eagerly, when the Mexican women streamed forth, Lola, Lolita, Dolores, the baby, all excitement and wild ejaculated prayers and kisses.

Then she grew quieter; going over every inch of the old dear home, opening the locked doors, looking up at ceilings, unbolting the heavy shutters to get once again the beloved aspects from windows. The dining room was dark, unearthly green light filtered in upon the table that was pushed aside, upon the sunken earth floor.

"This was my room," Juanita said, in a stilled voice, "this was Mother's room. See those marks on the wall there, Kent. Those were made by Indian arrows almost a hundred years ago."

Everywhere there was silence, packed dead leaves damp and odorous without, emptiness, musty smells, darkness within. The old range was cold, and some heavy storm had brought rain down the short, wide chimney, rain to lie wet and rusting upon the iron all winter long. A few potatoes had sprouted in the dark and sent white-green feelers across the nicked, stained wood of the table.

But sunlight flooded the old balconies and lay bright and clear among the pampas grasses and willows and lilacs of the garden.

"One could make it a home again, Kent. For all their smartness, the modern architects can't build such walls as these! They don't get these proportions, so broad and smooth, so not quite straight, so mellowed! Imagine the rooms cleaned, the rugs down, water in the fountain again,

and a hot, hot still August day, all blue shadows and blinding light, in the patio!"

Kent said little. He was glad when they were out among the good barnyard smells again. But under all the discoveries, the recognitions and memories that were like one voice of welcome, there was for Juanita the pervading sense of satisfaction in his presence.

Even at his least responsive moments, in his most casually indifferent mood, it was strangely quieting to know him there. He lounged about the corner of the hay barn, spoke a few careless words of Spanish to one of the men, took his car into Solito for gas and oil—yet he was *there*. And his being there lent a thrilling and satisfying light to Juanita's day. She told herself a thousand times that nothing could ever take this day away from her.

It was almost one o'clock when they took the lunch basket to the rocks where first they had met, sun-bathed rocks to-day, with the tame sapphire of the sea quietly lipping them.

There was something typically—well, what was it?—masculine, in his fashion of surrendering the basket to her, once it was placed, level and secure, in the shadow of a great boulder. The part of the male to secure the food, of the woman to administer and prepare it, his comfortable lapse into idleness seemed to imply.

Juanita happily assumed the responsibility. She unhasped the hamper, took out the fringed napkins, the cups, poured coffee smoking from the thermos bottle, and learned that he liked cream and three lumps, exclaimed ravenously over the fried chicken that was still faintly warm, and the buttered French bread that was sour and crisp. Salad was fresh in an iced compartment of white enamel, there was a gipsy-kettle, fitted snugly into an octagonal recess.

"Kent, I never saw such a darling box! Who does it belong to?"

"It belongs to me," he said.

"But how did you happen to have it?" she asked, surprised.

"Because I bought it—no longer ago than Wednesday."

"But, good gracious—aren't they terribly expensive?"

"This was rather expensive," he admitted. "I was in the city, on Friday, buying cigars for Mr. Chatterton, and I saw it, and remembered that you and I were to have a picnic today, and got it. It's English, I believe. Did you ever see anything that so perfectly suggested a nursery tea on the moors?"

She mused. "How I would love to see England!"

"Well," he suggested encouragingly, "you probably will. A year or two ago, spending your school vacations down here, you might have said, 'How I should like to see Manila!' And this time next week you will be on your way there."

"As a companion and mother's helper," she reminded him. "That may be a very difficult position. It seems a jump into the dark. It doesn't seem real, somehow. It's a very remote post, you know, and Mrs. Coleman, in a charming letter to me, says that it will be deathly dull."

Kent stretched himself on the warm, slanted surface of the rock, in the blue shadow of a great boulder, and Juanita began to repack the picnic box with almost the same enthusiasm she had felt at its unpacking. Now he opened his eyes to send her the rare, the strangely sweet smile she so loved in him.

"I'll come down and rescue you," he suggested.

"Is there really any hope of it, Kent? I shall feel so horribly lonesome!" she asked wistfully.

"Yes, there's a very fair chance of it," he answered, in a practical tone, after a moment. And before she spoke again he had reverted to the topic of Sidney Fitzroy. "I want to clear up this Fitzroy matter before I leave Mr. Chatterton," he said.

"Back here at home," Juanita said dreamily, idle now, and leaning against a sloping rock of her own, with her hands locked behind her head and her half-closed eyes far away on the sea, "I feel as if nothing would be cleared up again! Six months ago I left school supposing that all the rest of my life would be spent right here. Perhaps I imagined I might marry one of the men in Solito—there are writers there, interesting people sometimes!" she added. "But that—that would be catastrophe."

He knew that she was merely thinking aloud, and made no comment.

"First, the stormy day when you were here," she retraced it, "and then Mother's illness, and her mention of that man—I'd never heard the name of Sidney Fitzroy before. Then reading the will and feeling that other people would have the rancho. And then"—and she smiled across at him, immediately afterward looking out to sea again—"then you again," she reminded him.

"After that, the Chatterton house, so wonderful, yet so big and unreal, in some way, and Billy being so kind, and Anne Russell being so kind—and suddenly, her coming home, Mrs. Chatterton, such a glorious person!

"And since then," she added, "it's all been so mixed and queer. Her voice that I thought I recognized. Her trying to send me up to town, to live at the Saint Monica Club. And then, suddenly changing all that—I was to go off, so suddenly, to Manila. And then—what we found out on New Year's Day, about the man you're hunting, and the man I'm hunting, being the same. Who is he, and who am I, and what does she know about it?"

"It *is* funny," Kent conceded musingly, as she paused. "But it probably has some quite commonplace explanation. Here's a consideration that came to me in the night," he added. "If I run this Fitzroy to earth, it's extremely prob-

able that we'll find that you have some claim on him. And that Mission Street property is worth something."

"Kent, might he be my father?" she asked suddenly.

"It's possible. That may have been what your mother was trying to tell you."

"Shall you ask Mrs. Chatterton outright if she knows anything about him?"

"I may—now," he answered thoughtfully. "Well," he roused himself, "I wish we were here for six weeks, but we aren't—we have to go home again. Come along!"

They walked, almost in silence, along the cliffs, back to the farmyard, and the car. The cows were slumping awkwardly home for the milking now; at three o'clock there were long shadows across the earth. Kent strapped the lunch box in place, and Juanita, rather pale but perfectly steadfast and composed, said good-bye to the Mexican women, kissed the old baby and the new baby, and was once again tucked into the front seat for the long run home.

Perhaps she was tired, she did not talk very much, only occasionally volunteering a little information: "That's the Rodriguez place. That's where the old Camino Real went through—the Royal Highway, you know, long before the Americans came. That's the Crazy Mule Road, where there was a terrible fight between the Chinese and the Mexicans, years ago. I've ridden this far, many a time. There are five old maids living in here, with about forty dogs. The Señoritas Gomez. They have a single-footer who has taken lots of prizes."

When the landmarks stopped, she fell silent, and Kent was silent, too. After a while, the sweetness, the softness of her leaned a little against his shoulder, and he glanced down, thinking she might be sleepy.

But her beautiful blue eyes were wide awake, fixed solemnly on space.

"What are you thinking about, Juanita?" he asked affectionately.

"Wishing this day needn't end," her voice said, out of the twilight, with a deep sigh.

"You like me, then?" he asked, with a little awkward laugh.

"I like you very much, Kent," she said, her voice thickening suddenly. And for a while they drove in silence.

But when they had reached the house, quite in the dark of a Sunday evening now, and when he had brought the car about the curve to the very spot from whence it had started ten hours before, he got out and came around it, and as he freed her from her wrappings and helped her to stand, stiff, and shaky, and sleepy, and laughing, on the dark path, he said suddenly, in a low voice:

"Juanita, you don't know how I like you! It isn't fair, perhaps to say even that—you know how I've been trying not to say it! But it's no use. I *want* you so——"

He had only gotten so far before, to them both, the mumbled, confused words became superfluous, and, trembling, she put her hand on his shoulder and he his arms about her. Juanita, not knowing what she did, raised her face, in the dim gloom, and Kent bent to her for his first kiss. And for a long minute they clung so, the girl's slender body close to his, their hearts beating together, and all the world whirling about Juanita in a storm of ecstasy and fear and joy.

The bigness of him, the strength of him, in the big rough coat! The touch of his hard cheek on hers, the warmness of his breath and the faint out-of-door odour of his hair and face. Juanita felt her senses swimming. She said "Kent—Kent——"

But she made no attempt at resistance. And after a few seconds she was free, free to vanish in at the side door and run up the dark stairs with her heart singing wildly and every pulse in her body thrilling.

Her room at last, nobody had stopped her, nobody, indeed, had seen her. She flashed in, touching a light. Fatigue was gone now, sleepiness and cold. Her coat was flung on the bed, where her prayer book still lay from this morning, and her hat followed it. Juanita stood in the centre of the room, panting, glowing, her eyes stars, her whole body electrified.

CHAPTER XIV

OH, ECSTASY—to be loved by the man she loved! To be in love—to have someone in love with you! In his arms—she had been in his arms! And he had stooped, the big arm holding her shoulders so gently, so tightly, to press his face against hers——

But, no, she couldn't think of that. It suffocated her. She shut her eyes, swaying, as she stood in the middle of the plain, pretty room, intoxicated with the memory of it. Kent. Kent. He had spoken of another woman—a shadow. A mere dead memory.

Her mirror. She was at it, staring at herself, this transformed girl who was beloved! Her dishevelled vision laughed back at her excitedly. Her heart was bursting.

Presently she went into the hall; found a window that commanded the curve of the drive. There, in the black dark, he had stopped the car. Electricity thrilled through her again, from head to foot. The car was, of course, gone now. No matter, that bit of the drive was forever sacred.

He was somewhere in this house. It seemed a miracle, too much to believe. His dark face, his strangely deep voice—somewhere in this house, that reluctant dark smile of his——

Carrie had come upstairs. Juanita, kneeling, staring out of the dark window, jumped in terror. All footsteps were Kent's to-night. Carrie's room was farther on, in the same wing.

"There's a note for you, Miss Espinosa. And would you like I should bring some supper up to your sittin' room?" Carrie asked.

A note! Kent's hand. But she had expected this. She could feel her breath plunging again. She said something to Carrie, went back into her own room.

Juanita [said the note], I'm playing bridge with both the C's. To-morrow? KENT.

Ecstasy. Ecstasy. Juanita propped the note on her bureau as she made preparations for a hot bath. She had her supper with it facing her, upright against her tumbler. But she could not eat or read. Everything swam about her in a confused brightness and excitement; she could not get her thoughts in order, but they were all sweet. Each second had its value, but some seconds, remembered, were too poignantly dear, too heart-stopping and breath-taking for familiar use. She had to treasure them; she knew, even now, that when she was in bed, in the dark, she would take them out like jewels, go off to sleep holding them tight, as she had once held her dolls.

Meanwhile, she crept softly through doors and passages to the upper hallway, dimly lighted to-night, with an occasional maid crossing it, and to the head of the wide stairway. Light issued in a warm stream from Mr. Chatterton's apartments, but everything out here was mellowed and shadowy.

A slim girl in a dark dress could silently descend the stairway, stop at the halfway station, behind the kindly dropping fingers of the palms, and so look down, across the lower hall, into the little study where the bridge game was in progress.

She could see Mrs. Chatterton, lovely to-night in a cobwebby black lace, diamonds flashing about her throat. The hand that handled the cars so smoothly, so expertly, flashed with the blue-white fires, too. Kent was her partner.

Juanita had to bend forward, almost into dangerous prominence, to see him. He was in evening dress, always

becoming to big, lean men; his face was attentive to his cards, he was faintly frowning.

"They're too clever for us, Dick!" she heard old Chatterton say, as he leaned back after a hand. Kent's big fingers leisurely gathered the cards, Jane Chatterton's white hand, blazing with diamonds, scored the points, and her exquisite voice said lazily:

"There—that's better. Two hundred points cuts them down very nicely——"

"Oh, heavens, how you frightened me!" Juanita, recalled suddenly to herself, said with a half gasp and a half laugh, finding Billy Chatterton in the shadows of the landing beside her. Their hands were locked, they were both laughing.

"Hello, hello!" he said, in an eager whisper. "Don't give me away. Nobody knows I'm home! Come back upstairs—where can we go——"

Tiptoeing, still clinging to each other's fingers, they went silently back to the upper landing, and through the doorway into the back hall, the upper service hall.

"I didn't know you were coming home!" the girl said, blinking in the brighter light, and smiling at him.

"Well, neither did I. What were you doing? Just watching them?"

The secret joy came back to her heart in a flood. Kent. Kent.

"I'd just gone down there. Sometimes I watch from there," she said. "I saw your mother go down to the party, New Year's Eve, from that landing. She didn't see me."

"She'd have been tickled to death if she had!" he said.

"Well, I don't think she would have minded." His face was dirty, Juanita discovered, he was cold, red-faced, tired from a long run. "You've had your supper?" she asked.

"I had two chicken sandwiches and a bottle of ginger ale at Pebble Beach at twelve o'clock," he answered. "I'm

ravenous. Could you round up Dudgeon, or Unger, or somebody to feed me? I'll wash my hands. But I don't want to interrupt the bridge game until I'm clean."

"Of course!" She skimmed down the back stairway like a swallow. Nobody but Rosie, one of the undermaids, could be roused at this hour on Sunday night; the upper servants, it appeared, were having their own card game, with coffee and sandwiches, upstairs; Mrs. Murdock had gone to church.

Rosie, snorting with excitement, however, and Juanita, laughing with sheer lightness of heart, and Billy, all elaborate caution and clumsy noiselessness, opened presses and ice boxes, unearthed supper for a dozen, and spread cold turkey, cake, salad, fruit, and a dozen embellishments, on one end of the pantry table.

Juanita sat opposite the son of the house, when Rosie had disappeared, and Billy, with his mouth full, told her odds and ends of news about the house party.

"Did you have a good time?"

"Oh, fine! Lots of nice people there—we went over to the Enchanted Cottage and played roulette every night—golf all afternoon." He bit largely through a roll. "Slept all morning," he added, "breakfast at twelve, and on the links at one. Then we'd play poker until about eleven, and then go over to the Cottage."

"It sounds to me like one long headache," Juanita said, with a little shuddering laugh. "But I thought, and I know your mother thought, that you were not going to be home until Tuesday night?" she added.

"Well, I wasn't. But the whole party kind of broke up in a row this morning," he explained frankly. "Bert Lilley had too much last night and got kind of noisy, and one of the Hamilton girls rode into Monterey this morning and sent herself a telegram that her mother wanted her at home, and we all decided that too much was enough."

"I've been over just that same ground to-day," Juanita said. She told him that she and Kent had picnicked in that neighbourhood on the old rancho where she had spent all her life. Billy knew the country somewhat, was interested, as a motorist, in identifying it.

"Which creek? The one with the cement bridge?"

"Oh, no—no! Miles below there. You know where the fisheries are? Well, beyond them there's a big road sign that says 'Beach Route. Passing the old Espinosa Rancho'," Juanita explained.

"And a sorter curve, through willows?"

"Yes—yes!" She was all eagerness. "That's the place!"

"Oh, I know where you mean," he nodded. "Gosh, that was some run!" he commented simply. "Aren't you pretty tired?"

"Well, I was. I will be to-morrow, perhaps. But I had a hot bath——" Her thoughts were with Kent again, electrified, ecstatic. Tired! She could fly, to-night. "I haven't much time," she went on. "You know I'm going away. I go up to town on Tuesday, and this was my last chance to see the rancho, perhaps in months."

"Where you going?" he asked sharply, looking up.

"Why, a Mrs. Coleman, a friend of your mother, is sailing for Manila. Her husband is an army officer——"

"Jud Coleman, yes, I know him," he interrupted, with an impatient nod. "What about it?"

"Well, it seems that Mrs. Coleman doesn't like to go down there alone—they're not to be in Manila, but at some rather lonely post, quite a distance away—and she has asked me to go with her as a companion," Juanita explained. "They sail—we sail—on Thursday."

"What's the idea of that?" Billy asked blankly, after a pause. He had laid down his knife and fork, still holding their handles, and was staring at her with a frown.

"Your mother thought it would be a good opportunity for me."

"An opportunity! Out there on a dead-and-alive post—my Lord, you'll be bored to death! A few second lieutenants——"

"I don't think the idea is for me to stay during their whole time there," Juanita offered, a little discouraged.

"Well, I should hope it wasn't!" Billy muttered disgustedly, attacking the turkey again. "My Lord!"

"Then you'd have gone off without seeing me again?" he asked suddenly, hurt, like a small boy.

"I was going to leave you a note," she said, hoping she would have remembered to do it.

For a few minutes, finishing his meal now, he ate in silence, scowling, obviously discontented.

"I'll be darned if I see any sense in it!" he said more than once. "Why don't you say you won't go?"

"I want to go," the girl answered. But immediately in her own heart she questioned her own statement. Did she? Only this morning, perhaps, the prospect had been agreeable enough. But to-night her lips were still burning from a man's kiss.

He hadn't wanted to love her—Kent. He had felt himself held by another woman. It was only after the happy day's talk, the picnic on the rocks, the long drive, when her shoulder had been close to his shoulder, that he had suddenly discovered her, suddenly put his arms about her, and with a stumbling and incoherence so utterly unlike his usual indifferent, careless manner, had muttered that he loved her.

Manila or India or Alaska—what did it matter?—if Kent loved her, if he were coming to get her. She smiled dreamily at Billy; this handsome boy, in the cleanly bright woodwork and porcelain of the pantry, was talking agitatedly, but she did not quite grasp what he was saying.

Billy was blond, rosy, handsomer than Kent. Kent was tall, dark, with a brief, reluctant flash to his smile.

"Tell me the low-down now, wouldn't you?" Billy was asking urgently.

What on earth had he been talking about? She smiled at him.

"Wouldn't you have a better time here?" Billy said. And to her horror he pushed aside his glass and plate, and leaned across the narrow table to lay his hand on her own. "I'm going to tell you something," he said, laughing a little, but in earnest, too, "I came home partly on your account. You've —you've got me *just* where you want me! Aw—aw – Juanita!"

Clumsily phrased and inelo quently delivered, yet it was unmistakable. Juanita leaned back, smiling nervously, the bright light above her head shining into her blue eyes and giving a transparent glory, like that of a sun-flooded flower, to the exquisite purity of her skin.

"Don't talk like that!" she said.

"Why not?" he asked excitedly, in a low tone.

"Oh, because—your mother would be *wild*."

"Don't talk like a second-girl!" Billy reproved her hotly. "You're just as good as my mother!"

For a moment they were silent, looking straight at each other. Then both laughed, and Juanita said:

"I didn't mean that!"

"I'm sorry," Billy said meekly.

"Pumpkin pie?" Juanita questioned, indicating it.

"Gosh, no—nothing more!" the boy answered. And when he spoke again it was more mildly. "I suppose I sound like a kid to you?"

"You *are* a kid to me!" she answered, with an affectionate smile.

"I'm nearly twenty-two, I graduate this June and get a job on my father's paper," Billy stated.

"And I'm nearly twenty-four!"

He arranged and disarranged his knives and forks fretfully.

"Gee, I wish you weren't going away!"

"I'll be back," she reminded him, her heart so full of happiness to-night that she could afford him a little indifferent kindness.

"Won't you—say something?" Billy asked, in a low voice, after a moment. "You know what I mean. Just to let me know that—that there's nobody ahead of me?"

For answer she looked down at the table, over whose white cloth she moved her thumb back and forth. A troubled look shadowed her face; the dark, upcurved lashes were lowered. He saw her bite her lower lip; in her black dress, with the creamy Spanish embroidery at her wrists, and framing the young column of her neck squarely, she looked like some princely child, gold-headed and black clad.

"I can't—let you talk so, Billy," she answered hesitatingly.

"But you don't know me, Juanita," he pleaded.

"No, that's true." She raised doubtful eyes. "But—but I don't like you to say such things," she persisted, uncomfortably.

"Why?" he asked, hardly above a whisper, leaning across the table. "I want so much to have you like me, Juanita!"

"I *do* like you. But I can't—really!—I can't have you talk so," she protested, getting to her feet. "*Please*——"

"Please," he begged in his turn, detaining her with an arm lightly laid upon her shoulder, "please like me!"

It was so awkwardly said, so simply and boyishly, that she looked up at him with a smile struggling with the distress in her eyes.

"Billy dear, but I *do!*"

"Well, that's all I ask," he said. "Just give me a chance to make you—like me more!"

Somehow, she was upstairs again, again in the room that had witnessed her enchanted dream of Kent a few hours be-

fore. But she was oddly troubled now. Why did he want her—Billy Chatterton, who could have any girl in the world? Or did he? Was this no more than flirting?

Why had he come home, anyway, to complicate everything? To-morrow was her last day, and to-morrow—her heart seemed to leap like a separate living thing in her breast—she must see Kent. They would talk, definitely or vaguely they would talk—nothing else mattered! Billy's being at home meant a possible encounter, awkwardness.

She had left Billy abruptly at the pantry door, glad of Rosie's return, glad to escape. But his final words had been disquieting.

"Look here, is there any chance that my mother wants you to go to the Philippines on my account?" he had said suspiciously.

It was all so disturbing, Juanita reflected uneasily. Would he be foolish enough to ask his mother this outright? What a wretched, confused business the whole thing was, anyway! Kent asking Mrs. Chatterton about "Sidney Fitzroy"—perhaps Sidney Fitzroy had been an old admirer, even an old lover, of Mrs. Chatterton. That would upset her. And then Billy trying to overthrow the Philippines plan, when she had arranged it with so much interest and concern. How poor Mrs. Chatterton would hate them all!

Juanita got into bed, tired now in body, but feverishly and wearily alert in mind and soul. The scenes of the long day surged and receded in her brain.

She got up once to look down at the spreading side of the great mansion. From her window she could see the back library window, could see dull pink light still streaming through it on to the dark path. They were still playing bridge, then?

Again in bed, again tossing and troubled. And once more she got up, this time to drop to her knees, and bury her face in sheets and blankets, and say her prayers again.

Kent, coming into the upstairs sitting room when she was busy with Mrs. Chatterton the following morning, met her as if nothing had happened.

The shock of it stunned Juanita, and she went on shifting papers and taking notes in a sick sort of daze, holding herself instinctively in stern control, breathing a little deep, staring at letters and figures that danced bewilderingly before her eyes.

"Hello, Kent," Mrs. Chatterton said, with a friendly glance. "Change that just a little, Juanita," she resumed the interrupted business of the morning. "Say that Mrs. Chatterton can't answer now."

"Mr. Chatterton sent you his love, and he is on his way into the city with Billy," Kent said, dropping into a chair. "They'll be back about five o'clock."

"Oh, dear, gone for the whole day!" Mrs. Chatterton, who had been at some little pains to arrange the whole matter, a few hours before, said with pretty regret. "Has Billy a dinner engagement for to-night?" she asked carelessly.

"I imagine not—in fact, I know not. I heard his father say that you and he were dining with the Rogerses, and Billy said that he would take care of himself, he was tired, would go to bed early," Kent said.

"I see." She was watching him steadily, plans moving behind her bright, determined eyes. Juanita would be gone at this time to-morrow—Juanita would be gone at this time to-morrow. In three short days she would be on the ocean. Patience. Patience.

"Did Juanita tell you that we had a great day yesterday, down the coast below Monterey?" he asked idly. The girl's throat constricted and her heart stopped. He could mention it so lightly——!

"So she told me. I think that's all, Juanita," Jane said pleasantly. "Trunk packed?" she asked, as the girl rose to go.

"Yes, Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita answered, her heart smouldering. She was crossing the hall, blind with bitter disappointment, a moment later, when she found Kent suddenly beside her.

"I've got to go right back," he said in an undertone, with a glance at one of the maids, who was pushing a vacuum cleaner back and forth, some twenty feet away. "I'm going over her Charity Ball lists with her this morning. But I want to see you. Can we walk, at about five? I know some people are coming in to tea."

The tide returned gloriously to her heart. She smiled unsteadily over her shoulder, alarmingly near to tears, in the quick revulsion.

"I could," she answered, all roses again.

"I've been feeling badly about it," he said, his face dark and bitter. "I've no business to—work on your feelings. You—you'd better forget it all, Juanita. That's what I want to say to you."

"Work on my feelings?" she stammered, the ground rocking under her. "How do you mean *forget* it?"

"I mean—*forget* it," he answered stubbornly, looking down.

"But, Kent"—she asked, in a blank silence, "didn't you *mean* it?"

"Mean what?" he countered, almost harshly.

A horrible desolation and shame seized her. After all, what had been said, what had been changed? He had kissed her, following their long, happy day, that was all.

"You—you——" she stammered, her throat thick now, her one wild desire to get away from him before she cried.

"Well, what?" he asked cruelly, his steady look upon her.

Pride saved her. The scarlet stung into her face and dried her tears, and she gave him one full, unflinching look before she turned away from him and mounted the stairs.

"Juanita," he muttered, staring down, frowning, "I mean it for your sake. I can't—it wouldn't be square——"

No answer. She let his voice die away into silence. She was at the near landing now and she turned, opened the door that led from it to the back of the house, and without a glance or another word was gone.

Kent took one impulsive step after her, paused. He stood perfectly still, for a long minute, still frowning, still staring darkly down. Then he went back to Mrs. Chatterton's study.

Jane, admitting that she felt lazy this morning, had established herself in a deep chair, against whose dark tapestry her filmy soft morning gown spread itself lightly, like a silky cloud. She was telephoning when Kent returned, leaning back, the mouthpiece of the instrument resting against her breast as she listened; her eyes smiling at Kent.

"You're a darling, Louise," she presently said into the mouthpiece. "I'll explain to you when I see you exactly why I am so keen. Will you telephone him, yourself, at about six? He's in town with Carwood just now, but he'll be back this afternoon. If you ask him and rather insist that he come, I know he'll not disappoint you. And I'm so deeply obliged to you—I didn't want him to dine all alone to-night."

She hung up the receiver and stood the instrument upon the little table again. Kent flung himself into a chair opposite and eyed her with admiration.

"That's Billy who's being disposed of?"

"Yes, Mrs. Evans is most charmingly going to telephone him and ask him to dine with them. You know the girls were delightful to him last summer—he thoroughly likes them."

Invincible, he thought, watching her as she quite casually disposed of the matter. Her face was serene, her hands and eyes busy with the sheaf of letters she had picked up and was glancing at composedly. She and Mr. Chatterton were

dining out to-night; but Billy was not to drift about the house this evening, left entirely to his own devices. No, he would, instead, be nicely entertained at the Evans home, well fed, well amused, flattered by the pretty daughters of the house, and presently quite absorbed in mahjonng or roulette. To-morrow Juanita would be whisked up to town. And that would be the end of that.

He employed himself with a diagram, studying it thoughtfully, making a little note here and there, lightly, with a pencil.

"Do tell me what you are doing, you look too industrious!" said Jane.

"I'm trying to see if a woman's charity entertainment can be run on anything like reasonable lines," he answered.

"You're altogether too good to bother about it, Kent," Jane murmured appreciatively. "What are the—boxes?"

"Those squares are where the booths will stand."

"Oh, and the little rings?"

"Well, those just represent smaller concessions."

"And that—fire escape?"

"That's the band."

"I see." Their faces were rather close, over the diagram. Now she stretched a hand to touch it and her arm lay against his arm for a moment. She looked up into the face so near hers with a little laugh.

"Behave yourself, Jane," Kent said mildly.

Her innocent eyebrows arched.

"Wasn't I?"

"The danger of women like you, to-day," he answered sententiously, moving himself and his diagram beyond her immediate neighbourhood, "is that you honestly don't know when you are behaving and when you are not."

"I suppose not," she agreed, with a deep sigh.

And she looked at him, half smiling, half provocative, with her beautiful brown eyes.

The wood fire snapped; the cool sunless day outside was moving to noon. But in here were light, colour, warmth that might have belonged to any hour, in any season. Jane rattled pages, flung balled sheets into the fire, where they blazed and were gone. Kent, at the table, figured and made pencilled notes. A clock chimed noon, in silvery quick strokes.

"Your expenses will be about fourteen hundred," Kent stated, looking up.

"Oh, do stop working over that stupid entertainment and sit over there and talk," Jane commanded.

He gave her a steady look, flushed a little, shrugged, and obeyed her, taking the chair opposite her.

"What about?"

"Anything," she said. "About me, if you like. I do stupid things, I do silly things—but if I always come out of them right side up, and if no one is harmed, what harm?"

"What, indeed?" asked Kent.

"I suppose you know that I had a real shock when I first found Juanita here, two weeks ago?" pursued Jane.

"You said as much. You remember we somewhat discussed it."

"Well, I was silly to let it worry me," said Jane. "It has all straightened itself out nicely. Élise Coleman is delighted, Juanita pleased with the trip, and Billy—as far as I can see—never *thought* of fancying her!"

"Billy," Kent observed, with his long legs stretched out before him and his finger-tips fitted together, as he stared at the fire. "Billy hasn't fallen a victim, then?"

"Apparently not. He hasn't had much opportunity, really."

"Differing, in that," Kent added deliberately, "from myself."

She glanced quickly at him, suspiciously, but he was looking down and did not meet her glance.

"Exactly what does that mean, Kent?" she asked, after a pause.

"The usual thing, I suppose," he answered.

"You?" Jane asked incredulously, amusedly, in a silence. He flung up his big head, breathed deeply, looked at her.

"Yes," he answered straightforwardly. "It's been—that way, for some time. I've been fighting it, puzzled by it, for weeks. It's just come to me—there's no other way to put it. I love her."

Jane was silent. She rested her elbow on the arm of her chair, and her cheek on her hand, her eyes on the fire.

"You tell *me* this, Kent?" she asked presently.

"I can't very well do anything else," he said.

"Do you know," Jane added lightly, "I should be very cross with you if I believed you!"

Kent made no answer. After a moment or two, the woman began speaking again, deliberately yet not seriously:

"If I believed you, my dear boy, which I don't, I think I should ask you by what curious code of ethics you have decided to make this—interesting confession. Such devotion, Kent, as you have professed for me has not been of *my* encouraging, has it? Hasn't it been rather the other way round, rather a question of *my* holding *you* at a distance, telling you that I didn't expect your lifelong devotion? It seems to me——"

The beautifully enunciated syllables, falling upon the sweet, still air, lapsed into silence, and she laughed a little, shrugged faintly, and was still.

"Why take that tone?" Kent muttered, his arms folded on his breast, his troubled eyes averted.

"What tone?" she asked quickly. "We're not speaking of real things. We're speaking of a sort of joke, aren't we? I don't believe any man, Kent, could come to a woman—a woman who felt to him as I do to you—and tell her, of all the world, this sort of thing, seriously!"

Kent left his chair and stood at the hearth, looking down at her, beautiful and steady-eyed, in her big chair.

"What would you have him do?" he asked.

Her look did not falter. She was sitting erect now, watching him.

"Ah, Kent," she reproved him smilingly, "let's not hurt each other in this way!"

"But I'm quite serious," he persisted. "I've always liked her—just lately it's changed. On Sunday, when I had a long day with her—I knew, that's all. I want my home, my wife, my children, my share of the living and loving and worrying in the world."

Again Jane's cheek was resting against her hand.

"What about me, Kent?" she asked, in a low tone. "For her, that's all very well. It will be a solution for her, one, I suppose, that I ought to be brave enough to rejoice in. But I can't be glad, Kent," she added suddenly, looking up at him with a smile in her brimming eyes and trembling lips. "Two months ago—two weeks ago, I was only proud that a man like you could—care for me. It's a little different now. There have been moments now when I've needed you—when I've been so glad to feel that my—my friend was there!"

"My dear Jane, you'll always know that!" he said quickly.

"Knowing that you love another woman?" she asked hotly.

She came to the hearth, fragrant, beautiful, dewy-eyed, in her floating draperies.

"Tell me that you're only teasing me, Kent," she whispered. "It's all so confused—so frightening for me, now, and I can't let you go. Only a few days ago you were my knight——"

"Jane, don't," he said pleadingly. "You've always said that you wanted me to love some other woman—some woman who could make me happy. I've always said it never would be. Now it's come. I'm not good enough for her—no

matter. Whether she'll ever care for me or not, it's—it's the real thing with me. Can't you see it? You have them all—Billy, his father, everyone—you don't need me."

"No, I don't see it," she said, in a whisper, after a long pause. "It's—the real thing with me, too, Kent—and I've never loved a man in my life before! You've come to mean that to me, dear—I can't stop now. Everything—everything's gone down before it—I can't let you go."

She gripped his arms with her hands, standing close before him, breathing hard, swaying a little toward him, trying to smile.

"Is it so silly, Kent?" she asked, looking up with wet eyes. "If it is, dear, help me to forget it all."

"Jane," he said thickly, touched, embarrassed by her emotion.

"I can't—but I will!" she repeated, almost gaily. And she opened the eyes she had closed tightly to stem the tears. "I'll say good-bye and God bless you, dear—and her, too. It isn't just a cowardly mood, Kent, but I'm going to pretend it is," she went on, in a trembling voice she made gay. "I'm going to pretend that to-morrow, and the next day, and so on—and on—I won't hunger for your voice—for just one of the dear things you've said to me, and I've tossed aside.

"So kiss me, Kent," she murmured, close against his breast now, as he stood still, in confusion and utter shame. "Kiss me, and say good-bye, and thank you for being my friend ——"

"My dear!" he muttered. And her slender body was bent back as he tightened his arms about her, and bent over her, kissing the tearful shut eyes, and the temples where her dark hair sprung in firm, beautiful waves, and the unresponsive lips.

A door clicked behind them. Kent turned. It was Juanita, wide-eyed, ashen-faced, arrested on the threshold

by what she saw, who was looking straight into his eyes.

Behind her, Justine, and a half dozen of other servants, babbled and stared. There had been an accident. Carwood Chatterton was seriously hurt, Billy injured, too, not so badly. They were bringing them home.

Instantly Jane was in command. The whole household, and Kent at its head, moved under her rapid direction. Rooms were prepared, nurses and doctors appeared as if by magic; telephones were answered in low tones, friends came softly, went softly.

She never faltered. Billy was badly shaken, his face bruised. Carwood Chatterton was crushed, smashed, shattered—it would be days before there could be even a verdict there, if indeed he were not dying now.

The strange hours went on; it was evening, and the house bloomed with soft lights. Jane went into Billy's room, sat beside him, patting his swollen hand, smiling at him.

He had a confused idea of the accident, yet the only one, for his father never stirred, and the chauffeur had been instantly killed. It had been at San Bruno, on the crossing; the man was there in full sight, with the "Stop" sign, but Weeks had driven straight at the train. Billy had heard his father say, "Look out there, man, that bell's ringing——" and this phrase had been dazedly ringing in his ears, apparently without an interval, when he felt himself unrolled from the ball he had made of himself by the track, ten yards away.

He was not so injured, however, but what he drank chicken soup when his mother brought it to him, and was pleased to see Jim Turner when red-headed, scare-eyed Jim came tiptoeing in.

From Billy, Jane went to her husband's bedside. Long after the excitement had quieted down, she kept her quiet vigil there. It was six o'clock when she told Kent softly that she would like to see Juanita.

"She brought us the news, Kent, and seemed to disappear.

I've hardly seen her since—she did some telephoning for me, just afterward. I wonder if you could find her?"

"I'll get her," he said. He went off for a noiseless conference with the maids, scribbled a note. Waiting for her, he walked up and down the upper hall, his hands plunged in his pockets. No mistaking that she had come upon Jane and himself at a most unfortunate moment, this morning. Supposedly, in her excitement, she had not sensed it fully. It had lasted a matter of seconds only. And she must *know*—she should be made to feel—that there was no significance to that.

There was so much besides that he wanted to prove to her. That he could be gentle, be inexacting, that his wife would be one of the fortunate women of the world. That the troubled, cynical, bitter past was behind him. Juanita was to be his world now, Juanita and the old rancho, and rambles on the rocks, and rides into Solito.

His messenger came back with a report of failure. Miss Espinosa had gone, if he pleased.

"Gone?" he asked blankly. "Gone where?"

Jane had come quietly out of her husband's room, was interrogating the maid with frowning concentration.

"She packed her trunk, madam, and it was took to the four-fourteen, and she says she would send an address."

"Of course, she's gone to Élise! She was going to-morrow, anyway," Jane exclaimed. "Get Mrs. Coleman, at the Saint Francis, on the telephone, Kent, and see if she is there."

"She certainly wouldn't go without saying good-bye," he muttered uneasily, the instrument already in his hands.

Mrs. Coleman knew nothing of Miss Espinosa. Wasn't she to come in to-morrow? Was this terrible story of an accident true? It was in the evening papers. . . .

Kent hung up the telephone.

"She's gone," he said quietly.

"But, my gracious," Jane said, in a sharp undertone, "why should she? Where could she *go?*"

"That," Kent said, in a low voice, as if to himself, and with a deep gravity she had never seen before on his dark face, "that is what I am going to try to find out!"

It was midwinter now, dark and wet. The rain fell, day after day. The *Toyo Kisen* Kaisha steamer sailed for Manila without Juanita, and Billy went back to college. Old Chatterton lay quiet in his bed, pleased with his wife's constant attention, with the consummate skill with which she arranged his limited pleasures, his meals, his rest.

He would never get up again. He did not need a secretary now. And presently Kent, a strange, silent, unsmiling Kent, always gentle, courteous, and obliging, nowadays, went away, too. He did not say that the house had changed for him with the going of an eager-eyed, fair-haired little girl, who had slipped so quietly up and down the stairways. He made no admission of the fact that early in the cold Sunday mornings he went alone to church now, and knelt watching the congregation with heavy, sad eyes, and walked home alone in the red winter dawns.

Juanita never came back—never wrote. Not at the rancho, not through her old convent school, not anywhere, in any way, could they find her. She had dropped out of their lives as strangely as she had entered them, leaving no trace behind her.

CHAPTER XV

JUANITA'S second position was in the mail-order department of a large stationery establishment in Mission Street, San Francisco; her immediate superior was Miss Lily Wilson.

Juanita was paid fourteen dollars a week, Lily twenty-seven; consequently, Juanita thought Lily enormously successful. Lily ruled the mail-order department as she liked, and sometimes was called into conference with the heads of the business; she had her own stenographer, Miss Walsh, and some fifteen or sixteen girls were under her sway.

Lily was sickly, nervous, and thirty; she had a strange faculty for making her own inefficiencies seem laudable; she explained that her lateness, shiftlessness, and disorder were only because she was working at such a terrific speed and was so chronically overburdened.

Unlike most of the girls in Lily's department, Juanita had worked hard to get her job, however, and prized it anxiously. The girl had not known herself to be too entirely pretty and refined to walk easily into a position that a girl nearer the usual type would have no trouble in securing, and there had been some weeks of agonizing worry between her leaving Mrs. Chatterton, and her finding Steele & Stern, wholesale and retail stationery dealers and owners of the Stesteco Press.

She had taken a plain little room in a girls' club, had obeyed rules scrupulously, had smiled shyly when some friendly girl smiled at her, but had spoken not at all.

The cyclone through which she had passed had left its

mark. Juanita turned with a sickened soul from her memories—they were forever behind her; with her own old life she had nothing further to do.

The girls' club being managed only as a sort of clearing house for transients, Juanita presently took the typewritten list of safe boarding houses given her by the little secretary and spent a Saturday afternoon looking at them—on McAllister, on Lyon, on Howard streets. They all seemed alike, grayish black houses with flights of wooden steps rising from the street to the parlour floor, and dining-room bays, curtained in limp Nottingham, under the steps.

The landladies seemed alike, too, to Juanita's anxious, faintly frowning blue gaze. They wore safety pins on broad bosoms, and said frankly that the place was more like one big family than a boarding house. They all began "at ten." Ten was the lowest they could do it for, with the best butter and plenty of fruit, they said.

Juanita, subtracting ten from fourteen, bit her lip doubtfully. She went to look at one, in Fourteenth Street, that began at seven, but that would not do. The smell of the house, the women who eyed her from doors set ajar, the newspapers and chaff blown up like a tide against the dirty steps, all frightened her, even though the landlady here was obviously a good soul, steaming from soapy tubs, with a great hairy bare arm like a man's.

Eventually, she found a thing new to her, a hall bedroom, at Miss Duval's. There had been no hall bedrooms at Mrs. Chatterton's; all was irregular, spacious, gay paper and white woodwork there. There had been no hall bedrooms among the dear square rambling rooms at the rancho, those discoloured, low-ceiled apartments through whose Spanish windows one might step so easily to the narrow balconies, where the pepper berries and the eucalyptus leaves must lie matted so deeply now, after the winter storms.

But Juanita was training herself not to think of the ranch,

the strong, fresh smell of the barns, the crash and splinter of the punctual waves on the shore. That was all over. Those thoughts led only to pain—pain—pain.

Miss Duval and her sister were identical—tall, spare, dark, devout Frenchwomen. They set a frugal but appetizing table; they permitted no familiarities with their boarders.

These, for the most part, were elderly men and women, a widowed cousin whose twelve-year-old son's dark little face was already sprouting black hair, the city's chess champion, who was, Juanita gathered, a dentist as well, a nervous elderly woman librarian with her partially crippled mother, and two French under-secretaries from the consulate, who rarely spoke except to each other and in their own tongue.

Juanita had the top-floor hall bedroom, with a neat, flat white iron bed, a pine bureau painted white, white sash-curtains, and a chair. Her closet was just outside her door, in the hall. The view from her window was of Franklin Street, lined with three-story apartment houses, with garage doors under the first flight. They were all painted gray, brown, mud-colour, or a mixture of all three. In a city where trees grew house-high in a few years, there were no trees.

The Duval house was the only one remaining of what had been a respectable old row of bay-windowed wooden homes. It was wedged in between apartment houses, and the east-facing rooms had little or no sun. But Juanita was too young and inexperienced to miss the sun. She took the hall bedroom, at nine dollars a week, with the same feeling she had for her job—that in a life so dark and heavy she was fortunate to get even so much.

She walked to her job at half-past eight. Older women had been working for fifty years in Juanita's behalf, to make it half-past eight, instead of half-past seven, but she did not know it. It was a matter of entire indifference to her.

The streets were pleasantly alive, in the balmy still spring mornings, with other office workers walking downtown.

A steady river of them went down Eddy Street, split into smaller streams at the wide, sunshiny Civic Centre, formed again on Market Street. The buildings here were low and poor, second-hand bookstalls, markets, movie theatres, the humbler type of shoe and garment shops jostled one another. Sometimes Juanita lingered among them, coming home, but in the morning she had to think of time.

She crossed Market Street, walked along Seventh, turned in at the wide, handsome doorway of the Steele & Stern Building. Often her shy "good-morning" to the coloured elevator boy was the first sound of her own voice since the "good-night" to Miss Duval at the table the night before.

The mail-order department was in a large and spacious loft, airy and shaded pleasantly from the onslaughts of the sunshine by drawn shades on the southeastern side. The girls had a partly finished dressing room, with hooks set haphazard in a beaver-board partition, and a bare nicked and ink-stained table at one end of the long room had been dedicated to their luncheon time of leisure.

All about the walls were book posters, coloured leaflets, lithographs. Spare stock, in bulky gray-paper bundles tied with coarse hairy string, was heaped in the corners. Old catalogues and advertising matter generally were scattered about; it was impossible to reduce the room to anything like order, and during Juanita's time there it was never attempted. The zone immediately under the girls' feet was swept every night, and that surrounding the lunch table. Each girl kept her own desk or table in order, and large waste-paper baskets were carried away by the janitor every night.

The girls kept a two-burner gas stove in a crate, with tins of sugar, tea, salt, and stale crackers. They were not supposed to boil even a kettle up here; Mason, the manager, often warned them that the firm wouldn't get "a red cent" of insurance, if they kept it up. But Lily Wilson was haughtily independent of Mr. Mason, and went on heating

canned soup, making toast, even scrambling eggs in the loft, when she felt like it.

Lily was nervous and fretful over everything, her life was one long peevish monologue in self-defence, but some of the other girls were young and jolly, and Juanita would find a reluctant smile tugging at her mouth as she heard them giggling and murmuring. Altogether, the hours in the office were the easiest in her day.

Arriving late, Lily usually found her assistants sitting about waiting for her, fitting themselves to paper cuffs, manicuring, yawning, discussing last night's dance or film, sharpening pencils, making fantastically artistic disposition of their pens, inkwells, paper.

"Lissen, I think that Howard Street line's a disgrace to the city!" Lily might begin. Flushed, flurried, her hat still on, she would open the safe, fling papers before her underlings, plunge agitatedly into her mail.

"Here, Miss Espinosa, here's a long one—you begin to fill that. Go on with that one, Mamie. My gracious, I left this place at quarter to eleven last night, my head is simply splitting!"

Juanita, entrusted with a mail order, would move slowly along the boxes that lined one wall. They were big brown boxes, with hinged fronts through which she slipped an experienced hand to get "three leaflet, #19, 'Value of a Friend'," or six "wall card #11, 'If I Had Time To Waste On You, I'd Rather Waste It On Somebody Else.'"

Having started the group she called "my girls" to work, Lily felt free to be idle. She fell into deep, murmured conversations with Miss Crandall, from the floor below. Miss Crandall would sit in the chair next Lily, both women would pencil Lily's blotter while they talked. Lily might then put her inkwell upon the heap of her partly opened mail, and with a brief, "Don't anybody touch this, I'm coming

right back!" would untie her silesia apron and disappear downstairs for half an hour.

If Mr. Mason came panting up the stairs with his hands full of papers, one of the girls would say "Miss Wilson's at the telephone, Mr. Mason. She just stepped down." They had no telephone in the mail-order loft, which they felt an abuse.

At quarter to twelve, Lily, returning, would become agitated once more.

"My God, will you look what Mason's brought up to me! This can't go on, girls, you'll have to be more careful. It's nothing but complaints, complaints, complaints. My God, is that the whistles? Well, let's eat, and then we can get through it. Ring for the boy, Mabel."

Ordering through the boy was always a slow matter. Lily bit a pencil over her list.

"Girls, d'you want twist bread again? Twist bread if he has it, Roy. Two cans tomatoes, butter, two dozen of the big flat cakes—*not* the coconut. Have we sugar, Marie? No sugar. That'll be eighty cents altogether—you girls who are eating here to-day owe me seven cents each!"

And immediately Lily would go over to the lunch table, busy herself with cups and hot water, make the tea, set down the jar of jam, and presently slice soft bread and put the quarter pound of butter into a saucer.

It was almost two o'clock when she was really ready for work, and from then on the office was in a whirl. She slipped on a green eye shade, she put a pencil over her ear, she ran downstairs, came breathless up, scribbled, dictated, scolded.

Anybody coming up to the mail-order department now saw an overworked and philosophical, even a facetious, superintendent in charge. Girls fairly ran about, fairly wept as they said, "Miss Wilson, this order simply can't catch the afternoon mail—it can't be done!"

At four, Lily, in a boiling sea of papers, flushed and excited, would say regretfully:

"Girls, no help for it! We'll have to work again to-night. Who will draw dinner money, and do about an hour's work after dinner?"

Dinner money was a dollar. Juanita drew it on every opportunity, feeling it an economy. But she did not spend it as the other girls did, in the Market Street cafeterias and markets, for dinner. She flew home for the pot-au-feu and the good sour French bread of the Duval ménage, and hurried back again to the office afterward.

Some of the girls preferred dances or movies to dinner money, and these were not Lily's favourites.

"I do all *I* can—here until after ten last night!" she said. "Back simply breaking, too."

Juanita was a favourite with Lily because she always stayed when there was a general call for volunteers. Juanita did not mind; it was a part of her serious acceptance of the discomforts of her new life. Almost every week she saw a movie advertised that interested her, and thought that she would really go to see it on Saturday afternoon or Sunday, but she never did. She went to church, walked in the Park, went home to read a library book.

The big public library was near, and two or three of the girls at the desk came to know her, smiled at her. One of them, an older woman, tried to draw her out.

"You wouldn't want a good book for your mother?"

"I have no mother."

"For pity's sake! Do you work near here?"

"At Steele & Stern's."

"For pity's sake! Got a grandma to live with?"

"No, I board—up here on Franklin Street, with some French people."

"Well, did you ever!" Kind-hearted Miss Grogan could get no further. She told her own mother later that there was

something about that young one's eyes that made you want to cry.

"Maybe she don't eat enough, the way she's weakly," Mrs. Grogan, against whom neither charge could be made, suggested interestedly.

"Her hair is just about the colour of Gert's baby's," pursued the librarian thoughtfully. "She looks awful young to be on her own!"

But Juanita never felt young any more. Youth, in that sense, was gone. She saw about her younger girls, equally dependent upon their own exertions, their own salaries. She heard them compare restaurants, discuss shoes and hats. They rode on street cars with the night lights shining in their young eyes, they would not walk in the Park Sundays with some boys, and with others they would. They knew all the movie stars and directors and plays, they lived in the shadow of the city like a flock of daring little sparrows.

In place of rashly confident and unthinking youth, there came to Juanita's hurt spirit a timid sense of pride, of justified confidence, of daring. Weeks went by, and months, and still she paid her little bills, crept upon her solitary little path unmolested. She bought second-hand books for five and ten cents, she paid a terrifying three dollars for new shoes, she was deeply mortified when she realized that the girls in the office thought she should have a summer hat.

"What should I pay for a hat, Miss Wilson? Ten dollars?"

"Oh, God, no! Go up to Hale's. Tables of 'em for two and a half!"

Juanita could afford that. A small black straw hat with a white camellia on it. It was exquisitely becoming; her blue eyes looked more liquidly blue than ever under its brim; her soft gold hair fanned up against it like sunshine.

Long, long afterward, when these strange months came to seem like a dream, she realized that they had not been devoid of possibilities. She remembered Rob Keane, one of the

travelling salesmen, and handsome Joe O'Brien, whose brother was the famous pitcher, and what these nice boys had hinted to her about perhaps a theatre some night—how about a trip to Oakland, Sunday? Awful nice over there. She remembered Mr. Parsons, the city manager, whose wife was recently dead, showing her a picture of this wife, with the baby, and saying that he wanted Juanita to see the baby—a dear little girl, if her grandma didn't spoil her. And she remembered Jimmy Tate, red-headed, big, just a little—just a little like Kent Ferguson, somehow, whose married sister came away up to the mail-order department one day, in her neat tailored suit and her neat hat and her fox scarf, to ask Miss Espinosa if she wouldn't come to just a pick-up supper some Sunday?

At the time, none of it made any impression whatsoever. These men seemed no more to Juanita than the models of men that stood in the doorways of the clothing stores. This world did not seem truly the world, nor this life a real life—it was all more like a strange dream, dream meals, dream voices, dream faces.

"I may never get out of it!" she would think in terror, and sometimes, at early church, she buried her face in her cold hands, the hands that smelled faintly of the barred and mottled soap at Miss Duval's, and cried bitterly.

In May, there were two or three hot nights, unusual in a summer of fog and wind, and Juanita lay solemnly awake, thinking, thinking.

The street lights barred her white ceiling, the room was full of light. Juanita's room had two pictures: one belonged to Miss Duval and represented a bearded and sinister-looking man at his desk among dreary rep curtains, awaiting the entrance of two ringletted and pantaletted and scarcely more cheerful-looking children. It was called, "Papa's Birthday."

The other picture she had bought for herself—a photo-

graph of rocks and waves. Sometimes she stared at it for a long, long time, until she could almost hear the delicious wet fall of emerald water and foam, the scream of the little pebbles, and the high, dry piping of the gulls, almost taste the soft, salt, restless airs.

As she lay awake, solemnly staring at the light on her ceiling, she thought persistently of hall bedrooms. There were so many of them! All these old-fashioned houses had them, and there was somebody sleeping in every one, between crowded bureaus and chairs: the narrow bed, always with its back to the wall, the bureau between the door and the window.

Some of the girls had couches, pulled heavy covers off at night, and slept on beds that had been used for sofas as well. But couches would have seemed all wrong in Miss Duval's house. It was a house odorous of upholstery and carpets, of soap and boiling cauliflower, of heavy dark doors always shut on mysterious rooms, of decorum, even of tears. All Miss Duval's friends appeared to be in mourning, they came to call on Sundays, and the parlour was vocal with the subdued voices and murmurs of bereavement.

Now and then, Juanita, with the courage of one who dresses a wound, deliberately brought the old life to mind. The dear idle days at the rancho, when she had roamed over the cliffs, watched the waves brimming and ebbing, run in breathless to Lola's delicious meals in the dark old dining room.

Convent-school days, in a uniform, chattering and laughing with other girls in the long corridors, respectfully silent when Good Mother went by, or when one reached the door of the dark chapel, with its soft lights flickering before the statues, and its slippery floor. Commencement, when one did not know whether to be happy or sad, when nuns who had for so many years been severe and unresponsive softened suddenly into friendship, when duties that had so long been onerous

seemed overnight to have become privileges, fraught with sweetness and heartache.

And then, one vacation afternoon, when the whole world was scented with apples and tarweed, and when a wild warm wind was blowing the tide over the Los Amigos bridge, a strange man at the rancho——

Oh, to forget him, once—only for a few moments! To have one's world rid of that memory, not to have to think of that tall, loosely knit figure, those casually interested dark eyes, that voice that lay so often between teasing and indifference, and yet that could be so concerned, so brotherly, so infinitely heartening!

"Oh, Kent—Kent—Kent!" she would whisper, alone in the night that was so bright with street lamps. Just once to meet him, in a world where so many thousands of superfluous men walked the streets, even though afterward there would be a deepened pain to fight! Just to hear that voice, even though she must begin all over again, a moment later, to forget it!

The sheltered days in the Chatterton home would pass before her, moment by moment—those blind days when she had thought herself a typical working girl in a typical position! Those days when delicious meals, linen sheets, leisure, spaciousness, flowers, beauty, had all been so much a matter of course!

"Soup, fifteen cents; with bread and butter, twenty cents." Juanita would read from a spotted bill of fare. Her board at Miss Duval's did not include luncheon, she paid for her lunches elsewhere. And sometimes on Saturday she would go to a popular place known as Muller's Bakery, and treat herself to chocolate and whipped cream, and Muller's famous assorted buns, a dozen varieties of them, horns and twists, frosted and poppy-seeded, graham, brown, and cornmeal. This was not extravagant, it came to twenty-five cents. But eggs and bacon were sixty, and plain omelette fifty; Juanita

would smile, remembering her ready refusal to the Chatterton second butler: "No eggs this morning, thanks, Unger!"

Not that she was actually hungry, now. But there was a certain spareness, a certain limitation to all food, under this arrangement, that made it always a subject of burning interest. A thin soup, a thin slice of mutton or pork, mashed potato, green beans, and a saucer of some bready or ricey pudding covered with a glazed sweetish sauce, this was the invariable dinner, and Juanita ate all of it, and the plain salad, too, when Miss Duval according to her own lackadaisical account could "get" lettuce, and felt satisfied, yet not filled, not—somehow!—as one used to feel after some one of Lola's special efforts; the delicious mood in which one said guiltily, "Mother, I've eaten nine times too much!"

She grew thinner; the exquisite formation of the bones of her face more cleanly outlined, the transparent warm cream of her skin more clear. More than once Miss Wilson or the amiable fat Mabel Green asked her what she did for her complexion, and Juanita would flush brightly and answer, "Nothing!"

In the conversations that went on about her all day, she studied life. Some of it was shocking almost to the sickening point. Juanita would look thoughtfully at the speaker's face until suddenly her meaning was clear, and the hot blood would sting in her own face, and she would look down at the invoice on her desk in an actual vertigo of shame. The coarse jokes that unveiled the commonplaces of every day that had never for an instant engaged her attention before made all life seem cheaper—men were coarse animals, women powdered and painted and odorous tricksters, who found all the sacred things of the world merely "funny."

"Oh, please!" Juanita would murmur, scarlet. And although they laughed at her, they liked her; indeed, it was impossible to dislike so inoffensive a little creature, and Miss Wilson presently made her her confidante and special

assistant. Juanita's table was placed next to Miss Wilson's desk, and Juanita did nothing except under the older woman's specific order.

Sometimes this was embarrassing, for Juanita found that her chief expected her to prevaricate freely whenever Miss Wilson's interest dictated it.

"Listen, I'm going home with an awful headache, and you tell Mason, if he comes up, and that I couldn't hold my head up," Miss Wilson would say unexpectedly. "A friend of mine's in town from Los Angeles, and he wants me to go to a film with him."

Or she would send Juanita off on a trifling errand, adding good-humouredly to her instructions, "You don't have to come back, dear! An afternoon off won't do you no hurt."

This sort of thing, repeated in one form or another almost every day, made Juanita distinctly uneasy. She hated to see her superior fling a bundle of mail orders carelessly into the safe, departing with a "toothache" at four o'clock, knowing that this meant delayed work and probably "dinner money" to-morrow, and that the whole department would be demoralized for the remainder of the afternoon.

It happened in June that Miss Wilson confided to her the desire of a two-days' holiday. Friends were leaving the city in their car for Tahoe on a certain Thursday night; if Lily Wilson could join them then, she need be absent from the office only Friday and half of Saturday, then came the regular week-end holidays, and she would be back at work on Monday morning.

"Ask Mr. Mason," Juanita advised.

Lily Wilson leaned over the space between their desks confidentially.

"I'm wondering," she said, in a low tone, "if I can't work an ulcerated tooth? My sister is married to a dentist—Lew Pillington. I'll have *him* call up Mason, Friday morning, and

say that he's sent me to bed for two days, that I almost died in the chair."

"I'd ask for it, outright," Juanita advised. "They can't do more than refuse."

But she was not surprised to have Lily shake her head, in infinite wisdom and significance, and to learn from the girls on the following Friday morning, when she reached the office, that Miss Wilson had had that awful tooth out, and the dentist said that she ought to stay at least a week in bed, but she was going to get down Monday morning if she died on the way!

There were Friday mornings when this would have been received with philosophic calm. Every girl had a few complicated bills to fill, a few little jobs to attend, here and there, and ordinarily they would have cheerfully expressed to the harassed Mr. Mason their capability for keeping themselves busy indefinitely.

But this was an unusual morning. It was one of the two or three mornings a year that "old Brucie" came down, Bruce Stern, the president of the firm. Eighty years old, eagle-eyed, quick to sense slacking and deficiency, he was the herald of infinite trouble and resentment.

This time, to the relief of the other departments and the consternation of Miss Wilson's, he announced that he meant to spend the whole morning in the mail-order loft; he had "ideas" about the mail-order department.

"What's this about Miss Wilson never letting anyone else open the mail?" Mason, seated at her desk, demanded nervously. "We can't have old Stern see this heap of mail! Where are yesterday's special orders?"

"In the safe, Mr. Mason," Juanita said, spokesman for the idle group of girls who were delighted with the first hint of trouble; "she doesn't want anyone to touch them."

"Well, say—say, look-a-here, couldn't you girls get some

of these orders out—let the old man see you bustling?" demanded Mason anxiously.

"Why, certainly! We get them out anyway," Juanita assured him.

"That's right—you've been under her here for weeks, you keep things moving," Mason said, in deep relief, as Juanita, who had indeed done all this before, began to slice open envelopes and count cash and checks. The other girls, pleased with any change, moved about efficiently, quietly; presently, the safe was opened, and Juanita, with a frightened glance, saw that it was Mason himself who had given her yesterday's tumbled heap of half-filled and pencilled and annotated orders.

That was the first morning in the seven years of Miss Wilson's supremacy when the morning orders were gotten out before the afternoon mail came up, and the first morning in her life when Juanita knew the joy of hard and intelligent effort. She could hardly believe her own senses as the reorganized routine fell into place. A sense of deep pleasure, of triumph, grew within her.

Miss Wilson had never sent the boy out for special orders until late afternoon, three or four o'clock. Juanita had him upon his way at ten, had the miscellaneous orders he brought back packed and shipped before she sent him out with the lunch list.

"Have to work to-night?" Mason, delighted with the old president's comments, asked her guardedly at four o'clock.

"Mr. Mason, we haven't enough to do!" she answered, as surprised as he.

CHAPTER XVI

LILY WILSON was absent until Thursday, having had, as she presently confided to her intimates, the time of her life. She came back to the mail-order department to find everything changed, to find order, peace, adequate routine, and it was a full week before she could manage to have Juanita discharged and to have things begin to slip back into their old comfortable grooves.

"What's all this?" she asked, scarlet-faced, a dozen times, during the first bewildering hour after her return. "Who had the nerve to open my safe? There were orders there that nobody except me knew anything about! What's this packing table doing up here? I'm going right down to see Mr. Potter——"

"Lissen, Lily," the girls said, "we've been getting through at four o'clock, nothing to do—you never saw anything like it! And somebody suggested that we keep the boy's packing table right here, and then we wouldn't have to keep sending messengers back and forth."

"Oh, for God's sake!" Miss Wilson said disgustedly. "I ast you not to leave them open the safe, Nita," she said acidly to Juanita. "You've upset the whole place—I hope you girls have had a good time, showing them that they could fire a few of you and get along just as good! I'm going right down to ask Mr. Potter if I've got to have a lot of boys hammering boxes up here and wasting my girls' time."

And Miss Wilson untied her silesia apron, and switched herself away. She had some mysterious pull with Mr. Potter, one of the vice presidents, although he never saw her and

was only occasionally in his office. The girls knew that the Wilson family was one of the many decayed Southern families in the city, and that Mr. Potter was a Southerner, too. Lily Wilson felt that she could do anything with old Mr. Potter, and held his potent name over all her staff.

Two days later, kindly, indifferently, without explanation, Juanita was told by Mason that her services would no longer be needed by the firm. They had to cut down their forces, he said, and, as she was the last young lady to be employed, she could see——

She returned, sick at heart, to the office, and all the girls looked down at their work and were very busy when she came in. Juanita steadied herself with work; she didn't care, there were other jobs! Miss Wilson, beside her, pencilled absorbedly, went downstairs and returned, before she said kindly:

"What's the matter, Nita?"

She was astonished when Juanita, not without a hint of tears, told her. "What do you know about that!" she exclaimed. But she, and all the other girls at lunch, were enormously reassuring about the ease with which Juanita could get a new job. Lots of jobs, this summer. There was hardly one of them who was not ready to give up her job and try a hazard of fresh fortunes, it appeared.

"I'll tell you, Nita," Lily Wilson said confidentially, on Juanita's last day in the mail-order department, "it don't do to go over the heads—see? There's a lot a girl like you can't understand in a position like this—things it takes years to grasp, see? And when you just carried it all—now, mind you, I'm glad you did, because I don't like Mason—when you carried it all over his head, it got you in wrong, do you see?"

"Why, he told me this morning that he thought it was a shame to let me go and that he had talked to Mr. Kane!" Juanita protested, in astonishment. Miss Wilson coloured deeply.

"Ain't that Mason all over?" she said. "The big hypocrite! No, you see how it is," she went on, in a low tone, "you made an impression on old Brucie, nobody cares what *he* thinks!—and you had the whole place in an uproar, and the safe opened, and the boys with their packing table here, and it just—it just wouldn't work out, do you see? The first thing they do is begin firing people . . .

"Now, I've been here seven years," Lily added, in conclusion, "and I know that the only way to run this department is the way *I* run it, and that it can't be run any different!"

And Juanita, who had been answering newspaper advertisements in her noon hour, admitted humbly that Lily was probably right.

She came to know some of the newspaper advertisements by heart. They always made her heart leap, for the first instant, and then sink—sink. This alluring one, that began "High School Graduates of Unusual Personality" was the crazy old German with the patent food tubes out in the Mission, who would pay no salary at all until his invention proved a success. This other tempting one, "Would You Like to Make a Hundred a Month at Home?" had reference to writing movie scenarios. A third, "Room for One More Lucky Girl," was inserted by a patent medicine firm that needed lecturers. The man in this office had tried to kiss Juanita; she had reached the street a few minutes later with her heart pounding wildly and her cheeks whitened with terror.

Then there were the experienced stenographers, the experienced bookkeepers wanted; she knew herself to be neither, and was too ignorant to suspect that the "young lady" who would presently get each job would be no more an expert than herself. There was a legal stenographer needed. Agents needed for washing machines and kitchen contrivances that—contradictorily enough—sold themselves, it appeared.

Nurses wanted. Waitresses wanted. Mother's helpers

wanted. Waitresses wanted for country hotel; Juanita was afraid of that.

"Well, after all, I've only been hunting seven days," she would say, dressing. "After all, only nine days—only seventeen days!"

Then, suddenly, she had grippe—Juanita, who had never been ill in her life! July was cold and windy, and she got tired, going aimlessly about, formed a bad fashion of sitting dreamily in the park, in the sun, not thinking, consciously, merely drifting.

"Just a touch of old-fashioned influenza," the doctor said cheerfully to Miss Duval in the hall. But Miss Duval was not so happy about it. The world had come to feel differently, in the past ten years, about old-fashioned influenza. Miss Duval had her upstairs double rooms empty, and that meant no profit at all on her house. The four persons who could occupy these rooms paid fifty-two dollars a week, and Miss Duval felt herself rich if her business yielded her this much profit; there was always the certainty of a burst boiler, of street repairs, of new china or linen to eat away her margin.

To have grippe in her house, in midsummer, was an actual menace. All boarders were unreasonable, and to be exposed to contagious diseases gave them a foothold. Miss Duval, on the afternoon of the doctor's visit, went in to see Juanita, holding a folded handkerchief soaked in disinfectant to her mouth, and spoke of a hospital.

Dr. Brunker, it appeared, could move Juanita without expense of transit to a nice hospital, where she could share a room with another patient—and perhaps there wouldn't be another at all!—for eleven dollars a week. Imagine, when sick persons frequently paid forty-five and fifty.

Juanita was too dully wretched to know or care what was done with her. She ached all over, her head especially ached, she had a drippy, sneezy, shivery cold, her skin felt dry and her forehead hot. Miss Duval packed her bag, and helped

her uncomfortably into her clothes; garters not fastened, nothing flat or shipshape, her hat merely pushed on. She had but a hazy impression of the ambulance, where she lay flat on a cot, with a pretty nurse watching her. She was being moved, she was in an elevator, she was flat in a coarse, exquisitely clean and tightly unwrinkled bed at last; a shade jiggled—somebody said: "She seems sleepy; this will help that headache, I think . . ."

Oh, she was in such pain—she was in such pain. Oh, dear, why must there be pain? "Better, thank you," she said aloud. "And if you want me, see—feel here for your bell," the nurse, unseen above her, was saying.

"Oh, thank you." But Juanita would not open her eyes. To do that would be to send waves of pain through her head.

They said it would be easier, and presently it *was* easier. But her mouth was dry, her head sore from pain All the combated misery began to creep back. It must be night now, there was a light over the other bed, and somebody was shielding it with a crackling bit of white paper. It must be another old-fashioned influenza case, in that bed; they wouldn't mix influenza in with other things.

Oh, dear—why must there be pain? Juanita's bed got too warm.—No matter, she would try to be patient. The nurse said, "Wouldn't you like less covering? You're miserable, aren't you, dear?" and Juanita thought she could die of love for this kind, gentle night nurse.

She was nearly three weeks in the hospital, after all, and in that time she was happy. The nurses loved her, and there were always persons less fortunate to talk to; there was a ward full of pain and helplessness, and after the first week Juanita had a chair on wheels and went around the ward.

Nobody came to see her, except Miss Duval on the fourth day, but then Juanita expected nobody and was not disappointed. Miss Duval asked her if she wished her room held, and Juanita, thinking hastily, in a state of exhaustion so

great that even so small an effort made her palms feel wet, and her head spin, said that she thought she did. In that case, Miss Duval told her, the charge would be small, four dollars a week, and Juanita's eyes watered with feeble gratitude.

Still, illness was expensive. Her hospital bills were almost fifty dollars, and her doctor's bill forty more.

The first days, once returned to Miss Duval's, were hard days. The food seemed coarse and uninteresting after the hospital toast and milk and cream soups, and Juanita felt the stairs, and would reach her little room panting painfully and covered with cold sweat. She felt chilly, weary, lonesome, curiously out in the cold world.

In the mornings she hunted a position, in the afternoons lay on her bed resting. Up to the time of her illness she had not told her landlady that she was no longer employed by Steele & Stern; now everybody in the house knew.

She presently found herself debating between a position of companion and mother's helper, or saleswoman in a large Market Street department store. The first looked sheltered, safe, and—if the two babies were nice babies—pleasant. So Juanita went, upon a soft August afternoon, to Mrs. Peter Phillips in Thousand Oaks.

The horrors of this position, curiously, eclipsed everything that she had previously borne. To find herself in this perfectly new, perfectly equipped little house, with husband, wife, babies, and friends so oddly new, too, was unspeakably appalling. Their little meals, their carefully counted sixes in flat silver, their pleasantly limited conversations, their small bright car, their radio, telephone, Victrola, upright piano, somehow frightened Juanita.

The house, with its garden and two oaks, was set among other similar houses, lonesome and isolated beyond words to a newcomer. Mrs. Phillips still called herself a "college girl," and wore her soft brown hair loosely, simply coiled on

her neck, dressing in home-made pongee and youthful linens with wide collars. The babies were incredibly small, to be brothers, both at the damp, bottled, nap, and high-chair age.

Juanita, finding that "companion and mother's helper" meant cook, waitress, housekeeper, nurse, and parlour maid, pleaded the weakness left by her late illness, and presently—somewhat to the resentment of the young Phillipses—made her escape. Mrs. Phillips asked her, on the uncomfortable last afternoon, if she, Marian Phillips, had not talked kindly with Juanita, if she had not lent her books and suggested that she walk on Thursday with the Billings's nurse, and Juanita murmured, "Yes, Mrs. Phillips," and counted the minutes remaining, by the bright new kitchen clock.

The next day she went to work for the department store, so grateful for associates, for gossip in dull moments, for customers, with their crotchets and demands, that she almost sang aloud as she walked along crowded and jostling Market Street, to Miss Duval's, through the dusk.

It was, to be sure, a position that seemed to lead nowhere. The girls with whom she associated were, most of them, common girls. But Juanita felt it a haven, she made an excellent and conscientious saleswoman, and she was careful now not to know more than her betters, and so made no enemies, and was raised, in her fourth week, to seventeen and a half dollars.

More than that, at the Mayfair one could buy garments, hats and shoes and coats, at a ten per cent discount; there were sales just for the benefit of the employees, when everything went below cost. One might work on at the Mayfair forever, paid enough to live on, and buying a long line of clothes and shoes through all the years at less than cost.

Sometimes, girl fashion, when she was tired and blue, Juanita cried herself to sleep at night. Twenty-four, and no mother, and they—they had been cruel to her! She had not asked Kent to concern himself in her affairs, but he had

done so, and had then hurt her—ruined her life where men were concerned. She had not forced herself into the brilliant and luxurious atmosphere of Mrs. Chatterton's home, she had not schemed to win Billy Chatterton's admiration, all this had come to her naturally, and with so much pleasantness, so much dignity and beauty.

Juanita remembered her early walks to church, only last winter, and felt her throat grow stiff with tears. "What have I done!" she would sob into her pillow. "Things like this don't happen to other girls!"

But at other times she was resigned, if not cheerful. A good book, discovered in one of the second-hand shops, would make her happy for days. The first red, windless twilights of the autumn were a delight to her, and sometimes, on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, she would walk along the crowded piers, reading the names "Cawnpore" and "Liverpool" on the ships, and dreaming exquisite dreams about far-away ports, and flags she had never seen.

More than once she passed, on her solitary walks, the old building of the *Sun*, and wondered, with a quickening heart, if Kent Ferguson ever came and went there now. But she never inquired; she put him resolutely out of her heart; the mere thought of him was perilous now to all her painfully gained philosophy, her slowly erected house of life.

CHAPTER XVII

ONE late October evening, when the angry red of sunset had died from the troubled sky above Twin Peaks, and when Market Street had burst into gushes of light—red, lemon, orange, palest straw colour, white, and blue-white—Juanita suddenly found herself looking into the astonished and excited face of Billy Chatterton.

At one moment she had been indifferently drifting along, looking at shop windows—stationers' windows, hat stores, confectioners', markets brilliant with red meat and snow-white fat and curly parsley, and those cheaper jewelery stores that displayed close-packed rows of rings and watches all conspicuously priced: bracelets and chains innumerable flashing with gold mesh bags and secret society emblems in a glare of blinding light.

In the next she stood stricken with senseless terror; her heart pounding, her face whitened, the whole past brought to her again in a rush of fear and reluctance.

Billy, in a big belted coat, was handsomer, rosier, kinder of smile, and whiter of teeth than ever.

"*Juanita!*"

She gave him a nervous hand in a shabby glove.

"Hello, Billy. How—how are they all?" she faltered.

"How are you?" he countered, accenting the last word significantly. "And where in God's name have you been?"

"Oh, nowhere!" she said, smiling. "Here in town."

The lights of shops shone upon them in pearly dusk; a motion picture house a few feet away was suddenly illumined in writhing serpents of red and green.

"Will you come to dinner with me, Juanita?" Billy asked, glancing at his wrist watch in a businesslike way. "Then we can talk!"

"Oh—oh, but I'm afraid I can't. I—I live 'way out on Franklin Street."

"Couldn't you telephone?"

"Well, not very well. Miss Duval's not here to-night, anyway. She went to her sister's."

"Then why can't you come with me?"

It was against all reason, it was not what she wanted to do. But they were walking silently down Market Street together, and although Billy's big gloved hand barely touched her elbow, Juanita felt that escape was impossible.

He lightly guided her into the long arcade of the Palace Hotel, that was crowded with circling and moving streams of men.

"I look awful," Juanita murmured.

"You look fine," he answered, almost absently. She saw that the head waiter knew Mr. William Chatterton, was anxious to please him. "We've been in the country all day, just want a quick supper, Theodore," Billy told him.

They were put into a quiet corner, where they could see without being seen. Juanita took off her gloves, nondescript, soggy little gloves that had once been gray and were now iron colour, looked in the little mirror in her handbag, pulled at a soft gold lock of hair.

There were very few diners at this hour in the enormous room, but groups were beginning to filter in, and the musicians were in their places and taking covers from violins and piano. Juanita was trembling. But under her nervousness, under her determination to keep her work and her address concealed from him at any cost, there ran the delicious appreciation of warmth, soft rugs, music, subdued lights, luxury again.

The women who passed diffused faint delicious perfumes,

were exquisitely clad. The waiter bowed a sleek black head. The ice clinked in a glittering goblet.

Billy ordered rapidly, expertly. His assent to the waiter's last deferential suggestions was almost feverish. And when the man was gone, his first word and first action so touched and astonished Juanita that she felt the ice at her heart melting treacherously, felt a sort of delicious weakness stealing over her.

He put his elbows on the table, and his head, with its crisply ruffled and sternly brushed yellow hair, into his hands, and the voice she heard was almost a groan:

"Oh, my God, I've found you—I've found you!"

It shook her so that she felt her citadel trembling, tears came into her eyes, and the hand that she stretched for her goblet was unsteady.

"I've waited for this so long," Billy said, looking up, with his lashes wet, and speaking a little thickly, although he smiled, "that I can't believe it!"

"No, and I can't believe it, either," Juanita echoed. But he hardly seemed to hear her. Did he notice the shabby coat, she wondered, the plainness of her gown, the dreadful condition of her shoes?

"You're working?" he asked.

"In—in a store."

"In a store—oh, my *Cod!* Juanita, why didn't you write me?"

"I didn't—suppose you'd care," was what she began to say, but she substituted "—think of it. Truly, Billy!"

Again he rested his elbow on the table, and put his hand tight over his eyes.

"I never thought I'd hear you call me that again," he said, in a whisper. "Juanita, haven't you seen any of the 'personals' I put in the *Sun* for you?"

She looked too honestly astonished to be acting.

"I addressed them to 'J. E.'" he added eagerly. "Didn't

you see one? Oh, I'm glad—I'm glad you didn't see them and just ignore them!"

"No," she answered wonderingly, "I never saw one. Perhaps I wouldn't have known that 'J. E.' was for me, anyway."

"Well, I've found you, now," he said, "and I'll never lose you again. I'll sit on your doorstep, I'll follow you through the streets—but I'll never lose you again! You've *got* to listen to me, and you've got to let me be your friend! Juanita," he pleaded, as she made no answer, but only stared at him with troubled eyes, "I know you didn't want to go to the Philippines—I don't blame you. But that's no reason why you should punish me!"

"I don't want to punish anybody," she said, looking down through a dazzle of tears.

"Juanita, you'll have to tell me, dear! Was it on my account that my mother fired you?"

The colour stained her clear skin; she faced him bravely.

"Mrs. Chatterton didn't send me away. I went of my own accord."

Billy stared at her, astonishment growing on his rosy, handsome face.

"They told me that," he said simply. "I didn't believe them. You didn't leave any address. Nobody knew where you were. But *why?*"

"I had to," she answered uneasily.

"You won't tell me?" he questioned, disappointed. "All right. But tell me this: had it anything to do with me—your going, I mean?"

"Oh, nothing!" she answered. And for the first time tonight he saw her old, friendly smile.

"You were there when my father was hurt?" he asked.

"I left that night. It was something you couldn't understand and that I can't explain, Billy," Juanita continued slowly, feeling for words. "But it had nothing to do with you."

"It was Ferguson!" he inferred shrewdly, and the quick change in her face confirmed his suspicion. "You didn't ——" Billy interrupted his own question, and was silent for a moment, but his heart sank. Had she refused Ferguson, perhaps? Had he annoyed her? This was a new thought, infinitely consoling. "You tell me that Mother had nothing to do with it?" he asked, with a dawning return of the old boyish gaiety in his voice.

"I didn't even say good-bye. She hadn't the faintest idea that I was going," Juanita, now busy with "oysters Kirkpatrick," was glad to be able to answer truthfully.

"She told me so. I didn't believe her. I thought, for weeks, that she knew where you were," Billy said. "Do you like these?" he asked anxiously.

"Love them," Juanita answered simply. "They don't have them in the cafeterias or at Muller's Bakery," she added, with a hint of her old dimple twitching at the corner of her demure mouth.

He looked at her sharply, concernedly.

"You're thin," he stated discontentedly.

"Perhaps, thinner," she conceded. And as the lovely hour, the music and soft lights, the blended perfume of flowers and finely groomed womanhood, the warmth and savour of the food all reached senses long hungry for them, fear left her, resistance left her, and in the most natural tone she had used to-night, a tone touched with wistfulness, with tears, with a hint of breaking, she could falter: "I've had—had a hard time."

"You darling," Billy whispered, his own eyes blinking tears. And his big hand, hard and warm, touched hers.

"I'm sorry," she said, laughing in vexation at herself, as she groped in her jacket pocket for a handkerchief. Billy extended her his big, fresh, finely monogrammed one, and she seized it gratefully. "Tell me about your f-f-father!" she stammered, fighting for self-control.

"Well, you were there when he was hurt, when we had our smash," Billy began with anxious briskness. "He and I were in the motor car going up to town, and by luck Mother hadn't gone out—she was upstairs when they brought us in."

The memory of that upstairs room, in dull winter daylight, lamplight, firelight, rose before Juanita's eyes as he spoke, and she turned pale. Jane, beautiful in her lacy garments, held tight in Kent's big arms, his dark head bent over her——

"Go on," she said.

"You left that afternoon, didn't you? It broke Mother all up, too."

She nodded. "I—had to," she offered evasively.

"You remember that my father's head was struck—this was right near San Bruno. I was all out, for half an hour, but it seems my father kept muttering 'Chatterton. San Mateo Five-three.' Of course, the usual mob was all around us, and one of them recognized him and said, 'It's Chatterton, the newspaper man. I know where he lives!' and as they couldn't raise the hospital and our house wasn't much farther, this fellow drove us home. The car was an absolute wreck, and poor Weeks was instantly killed. It was Weeks's fault—there was a man on the track there, with the 'stop' sign up, but apparently he didn't see it. But you know all this! My father was unconscious for days, and he kept saying, 'Look out, there, man! That bell's ringing!'—it must have been the last thing he said before the crash. Well, they brought us home, and, as I say, Mother was there, by good luck, and of course they had the whole place full of nurses and doctors in ten minutes.

"Next morning—or maybe that night—I asked for you, and Kent said that you had been the one to break the news to my mother. I never have known," Billy diverged, "when you got away."

"I took the four-fourteen up to town—telephoned into the

village for a hack to take me and my trunk to the station," Juanita explained. "I went down to the side door. The whole place was upset because of the accident—nobody stopped me."

"Well, the next day I asked Justine or somebody where you were," Billy continued. "And whoever it was—I've forgotten—said that you were gone. My Lord——"

His voice fell, he shook his head, frowned, and sighed.

"My Lord, that was terrible!" he resumed. "Well, anyway, it looked for a couple of days as if my father was dying, but he didn't. He'd been terribly shaken, though, and it affected him—permanently, they think now, like a sort of stroke. He sits in a chair, perfectly happy—he reads the papers, and the men come out from the office sometimes and talk to him for an hour—he keeps in touch."

"They didn't go East, then—or to Spain?"

"Oh, no. He's not moved from one room, except to be wheeled on to the porch when the weather's fair, since that night. Mother's not been ten feet away from him—she's been wonderful!" Billy said. "She's devoted to my father anyway," he added. "Mighty few women would have done what she's done. They've changed the house, put a bathroom and dressing room downstairs, and built a platform where the porch with the parrots used to be, so that now he never has any stairs. And he has two nurses. Kent—— Juanita, are you going to have one of these?"

She looked at the tray of cakes blindly. Her heart was bursting.

"The brown one, please."

"Kent," Billy resumed, plunging his fork into his own pastry, "was a trump. He stuck around, making suggestions and bossing everybody, for a couple of weeks."

"Oh. He's not there now, then?"

"Oh, no. He left my father, and left the *Sun* right afterward."

"But why? Do you know?"

"Except that he's a restless sort of a guy. He's a natural born tramp, all right. He told me that he had been on a job for my father, trying to find somebody, and that he had found him—it was a question of some property for the new *Sun* building, as clearly as I got it, and as that was all he was expected to do, he was going to beat it. Afterward, I know he was here in the city for a while, and then he went down to Los Angeles, and he was down in the Monterey neighbourhood for a few weeks——"

"Down in the Monterey neighbourhood? What for?"

"I don't know. But one of the boys in the office said he was. I'm in the office now," Billy announced. "I was going around the world when I graduated, going as far as Spain with my father and mother, if they went—but that's all changed now. I'll stick around here for a while. The old man," he added affectionately of his father, "is tickled to death that I'm on the *Sun*—they both are. I have rooms in town here, at the club, and drive down about every other night, and have dinner with them. Mother reads aloud, and plays the piano, and beats the old man at 'Russian Bank,' and lets a few friends in occasionally—I don't believe my father ever was happier in his life, really. His right leg is helpless, and he gets pains in his arms, in the back of his head, too, if he makes any effort. Otherwise, he's as fit as ever."

"You told me," she said, "that Kent had found the man he was hunting for. Was anything ever done about that? He told me the man's name once—a man to whom a piece of Mission Street property had been left. Wasn't your father anxious to buy that piece, to build the new *Sun* building? Was that the man he found?"

"Well, it's all mixed up. Yep, that was the man," Billy said. "A man named Fitzroy, Something Fitzroy. It was just at the time of my father's accident, you know, when we didn't know what would happen to the *Sun*, much less

the new building. Kent was talking with Mother, a few days after the accident, and he said that he *had* found this fellow. He said that, as soon as my father could talk, he'd have a long talk about it. Of course, we weren't so interested then—the main thing was to see whether the old man was going to come back or not Kent stayed around, made suggestions—the downstairs suite for my father was his idea. And then he left, saying that he'd get in touch with us as soon as he located. And, by Golly," Billy finished boyishly, "it shows what an old tramp he is—he's not sent us a line from that day to this, except once, and that was to my father. It said love, and all that," Billy summarized carelessly, "and that Fitzroy had given him the slip again, but that the moment he placed him he'd let us know. And that was in May."

Their coffee cups, and a little silver pot of coffee, were alone on the table now, and Billy was smoking. He sat forward as he talked, bringing his glowing, eager young face as close to hers as possible, and Juanita leaned back, in a delicious mood of luxury and relaxation to which she had long been stranger.

Why, she did not know, but the knowledge that Kent had been as much a stranger to the household in San Mateo as to herself for all these months, brought the first solace it had known to the dull, familiar pain in her heart. A wandering tramp, irresponsible and unreckonable—that was Kent. Not Kent, but the women who were so ready to love him, were the blamable ones!

"Nita—this is fun!" Billy said presently, when he had screwed out his cigarette on the ash receiver and had bent forward across the table, resting his square chin in his two hands.

He was incredibly youthful, grinning in such complete satisfaction that Juanita could not but smile back.

"You look like a happy little boy!" she said.

"Well, that's exactly what I am. And you're—you're my little girl, aren't you?"

She liked him least of all in this rather self-conscious mood of sentimentality, but she could not snub him to-night. This taste of luxury, of warmth and peace and plenty, was too insidiously sweet.

"Well, am I?" she asked, looking up through a film of sunshiny hair.

"Aw," Billy said, stirred, flushed, awkwardly affectionate, "you're a darling!"

He put his hand for a second on her own. Juanita was vexed to feel herself quite untouched. She *should* have been thrilled, she *should* be able to meet these overtures with equally inane murmured nothings. Other girls did, other girls seemed instinctively to realize that the young male only wanted loving incoherencies, the yielding of hands and of kisses in return for his own.

She had found this impossible, even in thought, with any man; she felt a million miles away from this man now.

And yet, he was impressive, this handsome, beautifully groomed and dressed boy who seemed so young at twenty-one. His fine linen, his big belted coat, as soft to the touch of her fingers as a kitten's ear, the negligent ease with which he tipped waiter and head water and paid his bill, the matter-of-fact fashion in which he guided her to the street, and to the big roadster parked against the curb, all belonged to a world from which she had been an exile for many lonely months.

"Rug, Nita?"

"No, thanks! Yes, I think I will."

"You don't smoke, do you?"

"No, thanks."

He went about to the driver's seat, lighted his cigarette, settled himself at the wheel. But when he was seated, instead of touching starter or gears, he sat smiling at her contentedly.

"Now where?"

"Now home, I suppose?"

"Oh, shucks! Nothing doing," said Billy. "Let's go out to the Park?"

Her eyes sparkled in the light of street lamps.

"I'd love it!"

"Atta *baby*," Billy said, grinning.

The car glided out from between the other cars and slipped upon its way. They spun up Market Street, spangled with lights and framed in the throbbing brilliance of moving-picture theatres, and wound about the beautiful highway to the Peaks.

Here Billy stopped the car, and they could look down upon the glittering panorama of the city, the little straight streets running in lines of light across the seven times seven hills, the fringe of the long irregular water front, the dim bracelet of sparkling points that Berkeley and Oakland made, far across the bay.

Juanita hardly saw it, although she looked dutifully down, and dutifully exclaimed, as did the occupants of a score of other parked cars, shadowy on the dark hilltop.

The last time that she had been so tucked into a car had been months ago—the spring day of that picnic with Kent, down at the ranch. She would not remember it, that day of warmth and sweetness, songs of larks, ringing of cowbells, and the breaking of the blue sea on the rocks. She dared not remember it.

Suddenly Billy put his arm half about her, along the back of the seat, and brought her back to an acute consciousness of the present moment.

His face was close to hers; it wore an expression of half-shamed, half-confident pleading. His big gloved hand was in possession of one of her own. He did not say anything particularly distinguishable, but she knew that he wanted her to be loving, responsive, that perhaps he wanted to kiss her.

A throb of sheer protest and distaste shook Juanita's heart. She—she *liked* Billy, he was a *dear*, of course. But she hated this sort of thing!

Boys all expected it, and almost all girls at the store appeared to have this sort of familiar automobile flirting down to a fine point. But, somehow, every fibre of her being protested. Why couldn't they just talk, be friendly, do interesting and amusing things together, dine, lunch, have tea, go to movies and theatres, without this element of what she disgustedly characterized as "mush"?

However, Billy had been wonderfully kind to her, she could not snub him. The snubbing, if it were to take place at all, should have been all managed two hours ago, when he first had asked her to dine with him. And she had been altogether too glad to see him, he had brought back into her lonely and shattered life something altogether too precious and too much desired, to be casually dismissed.

So she yielded her hand, even adjusted the curve of her shoulder, to rest more comfortably against his own.

Billy was in ecstasies. He murmured against her hair.

"You like me, don't you?"

"You know I do! Don't all girls?"

"Never you mind what all girls do, you cute little thing! You do like me, don't you?"

"You *know* I do!"

The big arm tightened about her.

"You're going to let me kiss you, aren't you?"

A fleeting, upward flash of her blue, startled eyes.

"Oh, I don't think so!" she protested innocently.

He laughed, his lips close beside her ear.

"Oh, you don't think so!" he mocked.

"No."

"Why don't you, Nita, huh? Why don't you, dear little Nita, huh?" he murmured, over and over again, laughing softly and foolishly

CHAPTER XVIII

SHE felt very much ashamed of herself when he left her at her own door, at about ten o'clock. Her heart was beating fast, her eyes glittering, her cheeks felt hot.

Juanita noiselessly entered the hall, turned up the dismal bead of gas that wavered over her head, and glanced at the black chart that was one of Miss Duval's fondest devices. No, Mr. Clout was still out, and Madame David also, Juanita gathered from the elaborate pattern of the slips and pegs, therefore the bead of light must be left burning.

Up the dark, odorous stairs she crept. The scent of soup, of dust, of rotting old upholstery was like a presence, here in the thick dark. There were brass rods on the stair carpet, they gleamed like a path of dots, rising before her.

The upper hall was unlighted; Juanita groped, with her fingers upon the old wainscoting. A light shook gently in the back bedroom transom: old Madame Duval was reading "*L'Imitation.*" The bathroom, darkened, and with opened door, gave forth an odour of cool steam and cheap soap. It was Saturday night, to be sure, Juanita thought.

Her own room was lighted by angles and bars from the street; she knew the shapes and patterns of them all, now. She struck a match.

The forlorn, orderly little room stood forth harshly in the gaslight: white pine table, white pine bureau, blue kimono dangling limp upon the hall door. She knew every inch of it, knew the books on the table, the shabby contents of the drawers, the stocky, ringleted children in the picture called "Papa's Birthday." Beyond the partly opened plain win-

dow lay the dreary street; upstairs were more dreary rooms, downstairs more odorous hallways, and the plain, dank dining room, dreariest of them all.

Juanita did not undress at once to-night. She flung her coat down, and pushed back her hat, and sat on the bed, her feet stretched stiffly before her, her hands flattened on the flat, lifeless counterpane, her eyes, a little glazed, staring blankly before her.

She had let a man kiss her, and keep his arm about her, and murmur ridiculous commonplace inanities in her ear, and she did not mind at all! She had not even been thrilled by it!

Well, what of it? What of it? No harm in that. A girl had to do those things, in these days, or she was a wallflower, she was simply ignored.

Suddenly Juanita leaped to her feet, undressed rapidly, hung up her clothes, shaking her head meanwhile, as if she could shake away this new sense of shame.

She put on her nightgown, brushed her hair violently, brushed her teeth, washed face and hands in hot water and soap, like a child, with a wet cloth, and emerged from the towel gasping, rosy, shiningly clean. No use. She could not wash it away. The sense of bitter self-contempt persisted. It might not be wrong, it might not be wrong—ran Juanita's feverish thoughts—to dine with a man one loved, and drive about with him for an hour afterward. But it was certainly wrong—it was degrading, to do it with a man one did not love.

"But how on earth is a girl going to find *out* if she loves a man?" she demanded impatiently, half aloud, when she was snugly settled in bed and had lighted her night light and opened a book she found it impossible to read.

And the answer came with a sudden piercing thought of Kent. But Kent—Kent was a *man*, Juanita argued. Billy was only a kid. Kent would not murmur those silly, amo-

rous things into a girl's hair, anyway, that wasn't the way his generation did its courting. With Kent, a woman's one fear would be that he was not affectionate enough, that she could not win him to show one half of what he felt.

Billy was young—it was probably his first serious affair. He was rich, he had position and power, and that he was in earnest he did not leave her much room to doubt.

But even on that first night Juanita knew that she never would respond naturally to his kisses, never really want that big arm about her, never be anything else but acting—acting perfectly, gladly, even with real affection and pity—with him, playing the new game so well that sometimes she would deceive even herself.

He was working in the office of his father's newspaper now, going home two or three times a week, to relieve the quiet tedium of his mother's days beside the invalid, and delight his father with his interest and grasp of the business. On other nights, he occupied a suite in a city club.

Juanita had instantly appreciated that he was older, that he had developed in the strange, past year. Even now, he was not precocious, he was still the big, sweet-tempered, eager, commonplace boy she had thought a "boob" upon first acquaintance.

It salved her conscience a little, drinking the tea he paid for, driving with him in the beautiful car, knowing herself to be adored by him beyond all bounds of reason, to tell him so.

"You little moron, can't you say anything more polished than that?"

"What?" He would dig his face against her neck, half-strangle her with a kiss on her white, sweet throat. "That you are my baby?"

"Baby! That's a nice word. Do you know what I think you are, Billy? I think you are a boob."

"All right, I am. As long as you love me——!"

"Do you want me to get out of this car?"

"No!"

"Then please bounce over—here, put your hands on the wheel, where they belong—because I tell you to—because I can't think when you're kissing the ends of my fingers—I don't know whether my brains are in my fingers or not."

She had to pay with a few minutes of this sort of thing for the glory that Billy's friendship brought into her life. After the tea, the dinner, the long sweet Sunday drive down the beaches or through the parks, he would always manœuvre a few minutes of privacy, or comparative privacy.

And then she would feel his arm about her, his breath against her cheek; then she would hear the husky, half-pleading, half-shamed murmur, "Do you love me, baby? Do you love your big boob, Nita?"

She had changed toward him. If he really loved her, no girl working in the Mayfair could afford to ignore Billy Chatterton. It might mean a chance that would never again come into her life.

Only a year ago, Juanita Espinosa had felt herself rich enough to reject it. She had been Mrs. Chatterton's secretary then, living in the Chatterton mansion, afraid of nothing.

Now the world had changed. Juanita knew now that a great many men were fools, and that even the ones that were not were not necessarily desirable husbands. They might easily be cruel, like Kent. And very few, fools or not, had as much money to spend as Billy Chatterton had.

Money was important; shoes, meals, car fares were serious matters. When a boarder cheated Miss Duval out of three dollars and sixty-five cents, Miss Duval wept and came to the lunch table with frankly reddened eyes. To forget to pay for one's lunch in a cheap restaurant meant that some man would shout after one, bawling loudly, "Hey! Where you goin'? How do you get that way!"

No one would ever yell these things after Billy Chatterton, his eyes would never be reddened over three dollars and sixty-five cents. The sight of his big, undeveloped hand, opening his pigskin bill-folder, taking out endless crisp bills—and more bills—and more bills, had a horrible fascination for Juanita.

Immediately, she felt the insidious effect of the luxury he spread about her. When she had come home from a lingering tea with Billy at the Fairmont, the dirty wintry streets, the smelly halls and miserable meals at Miss Duval's smote offensively upon every fibre of her being.

At the big hotel he and she had their special table, close to the window. Soft music would be drifting through the flower-scented air when Juanita shook free her big, stiff, snowy napkin, stretched her hand for the buttered toast.

Below them, as they talked, steamers cut their white, ruffled wakes across the cold steel of the bay. The dove-coloured winter sky would be streaked with crimson banners of sunset; the windows of the prison island flash it angrily back to the west. All along the cluttered water front the fuss and confusion of shipping was eternally busy; whistles moaned and wheezed, the Powell Street cable car struggled, with a continual jang-jang-janging, up the hard grade just below their window.

Between Powell Street and the piers, on the eastern slope of the hilly city's sharpest hill, the pink and pearl and gold of Chinatown's lights fanned up and down, under the cross of Saint Mary's.

Juanita loved it all, the music, the warmth, the tea, and the changing beautiful panorama from the big window. Loved it all except the—the mushy part, as she told herself continually.

"Is it good, you little sybarite?"

"Billy, please don't call me names. I lunched at our own

counter to-day. Nineteen-cent special, Mayfair red-star goulash, fried potatoes, cocoa, and choice of pudding or pie."

"It sounds utterly sickening!"

"I assure you it was. But it was raining."

"I don't care if it was raining! What I want to know is, do you love the boy that buys you nice tea and sandwiches?"

"Well, what do you think?"

"Well, but *say* it."

She had to say it. No use saying the truth, saying suddenly and harshly, "Oh, I *do* like you, Billy, and I am grateful for all the wonderful generous things you do for me. But I hate—hate—*hate* this eternal murmuring and holding hands!"

Just to relieve her feelings once in this fashion would have been to end it all. He was strangely sensitive, he always demanded response, demanded the constant assurance that she loved him.

And except for this one maddening weakness, she might have liked him so entirely, she would think impatiently. In every other way, he was entirely charming.

But Juanita, going her way, and keeping her own counsel, would decide philosophically that everything in the world had to be paid for, and she must pay for Billy's friendship with this much concession, with little love notes that said a thousand times more than she felt, with a great deal of assumed coquetry and jealousy over the tea table, and with the willing surrender of her hands and her lips whenever chance gave him an opportunity to claim them.

No matter. Nobody knew. He had kept his discovery of Juanita a secret even from his mother. This was the one condition upon which Juanita would give him her friendship at all. She had become quite frantic with excitement about it, in the beginning, and Billy had conceded the point as a matter of course.

"The only thing is, Nita, that if we're seen together, people are apt to think I'm keeping it dark."

"Well, that doesn't worry me one tiny speck! Let them think what they like."

"Ah, you trust me, don't you, sweetheart?"

"Trust you—good heavens!" The scarlet had rushed to her amused face. "I can take care of myself!" she had assured him, laughing.

It was true. A girl who was not in love could always take care of herself, perfectly well. As the weeks went by, and the problem of their friendship grew more and more clearly defined, Juanita sometimes thought vexedly that to have Billy make her some offer that was less than marriage would be almost a relief.

To turn upon him furiously and banish him forever might be simpler than to allow herself to drift and drift, on this current of insincerities and half truths, into the serious relationship of becoming his wife.

And yet, other girls did that, too, every day. The mere absence of the craziness called love oughtn't to deter any sensible woman from a good marriage. Love was too close to hate, anyway.

She had loved, or fancied she loved, Kent Ferguson. But that had really been a sort of contempt, all the while.

And what if Billy was a little sentimental now, always ready to fall into that adoring, murmuring, kissing, and clinging mood she disliked, he would get over that, as all men did, when he was once married. A woman could so easily keep a simple and affectionate man happy, just by being kind, responsive, never hurting his feelings, making his home a place of harmony and sweetness.

She puzzled her head about it all day long, and sometimes well into the night. It was like living a double life, these working hours of drudgery and squalor, contrasted with the leisure time of every imaginary luxury and delight.

At the store she was only "Miss Nita," another pair of flying hands and feet, another dishevelled blonde girl among

the many, pale under the harsh lights, caught in a tangle of brass hooks and neckties, beads and handbags, stockings and ribbons and pencils, glass tumblers, dish mops, hand-embroidered lingerie at twenty-seven cents apiece, only two to each customer, wash boilers at eighty-nine cents, corsets at sixty-two. Sometimes she sold silly, coarse post cards, sometimes popular songs, sometimes sleazy cotton tidies stamped in pale blue outlines of roses and dots, to be embroidered. Once she was at the candy counter, close to the draughty street door, driving a nickel shovel into the salted peanuts and the pink jelly beans; jewellery, chains, toys, kitchenware, stationery, she was everywhere.

All day long, the tide of gray papers and straw and wrappings and odd bits of ribbon, beaver board, rope, tinsel, string, rubbish of all sorts, thickened about her ankles, all day long the little cash carriers dinged and whizzed above her head. She stooped to rummage under a counter without moving her eyes from her customer's face; customers had been known to ask for things under the counter, and then snatch something that was on top. She called, down seething aisles: "Mr. Kelly. O. K., please!" She sat, rebellious and respectful, listening to the "better salesmanship" talks upon which Rupert Bladd, the offensive assistant manager, wasted some of her precious leisure. She came to say, "Seen my book, dear?" in undertones, to other girls. And she usually went home tired, jaded, aching from lights and strings and imitation alligator pocketbooks as advertised, one-seventeen.

To pull her little hat over her always lovely hair, to wash her hands in the smelly, wet washroom, and wave them in the air rather than touch the sodden, damp roller towel, to straggle down aisles that were rapidly being metamorphosed by long muslin covers and by the extinguishment of lights, to stretch a weary arm to punch number seventy-six on the dial of the big time clock, to slip through a checked revolving

door at whose street side, at twenty minutes to six, determined shoppers were even now prevented entrance by main force alone——

And then to see the belted overcoat, the gray hat, the big, eager smile, to have Billy's gloved hand firm under her elbow, Billy steering her toward the car that was inconspicuously parked around the corner, to know that oolong and music and a soft chair and delicious tempered lights were just ahead—ah, it was delicious!

"Billy, how good you are to me! Like the best little brother that ever lived."

"Good, yes," he said once. "Brother, no," and Juanita, weakly and happily, laughed at his tone.

"I am nearly three years older than you are, actually, Bill, and seventy-six years older in spirit," she told him, one night when their talk was creeping—creeping toward seriousness and definiteness.

"The three years—which is twenty-nine months, by the way—are a joke!" Billy returned, cheerfully. "The seventy-six years are more important. But even at ninety-eight to my twenty-two—I like you a terrible lot!"

"But, Billy, there are so many girls!"

"Millions," he said, staring straight at her, an odd smile on his boyish, ardent face. Juanita, catching his look, laughed, felt her heart flutter. It was the steady, appraising regard of the man who has found his mate.

This conversation took place upon a December evening: one of the rare occasions when they could dine together. Afterward. Juanita was too tired to do anything but go home; too tired to smile, too tired to want to be kissed or to murmur love terms. Christmas shoppers had thronged the Mayfair all day, her head buzzed with their voices, her back ached, her head ached, her fingers ached.

"It makes me sick!" he commented gloomily, leaving her. He had wanted to go to the big soft padded loge seats at the

biggest movie theatre, and sit there in the black darkness, his fingers gripping hers, their shoulders sociably touching.

"Well," she said, tears of fatigue and discouragement moistening her lashes, "I don't like it so much, you know!"

"Then, why do you *do* it?" Billy said vexedly.

To this Juanita, almost leaning against the grimy jamb of the Duval doorway in her weariness, answered only with an exasperated glance.

"Well, you *don't* have to do it!" he said, as if she had made the assertion. "You could marry me!"

"For your money!" Juanita exclaimed spitefully, angrily, unthinkingly.

Billy turned red and grew sullen.

"It wouldn't be for that," he said, hurt.

"It would!" she said absurdly.

"Well, I tell you it *wouldn't!*"

"And I say it *would.* I don't care what nonsense people talk! When a girl as poor as I am marries a man as rich as you are, it *is* for his money"—she was almost crying—"or partly for his money!" she persisted.

He was suddenly gentle and kind. He put an arm about her.

"Well, partly, darling, I understand that," he said soothingly. "Of course, a girl thinks of pretty things, and comfort, and a man likes to give them to her! But it wouldn't be *all* that, would it, dear?"

She could raise her lips repentantly to his cheek, in the darkness, tighten an arm about his neck as she kissed him.

"Of course not, dear! But—but you'll marry someone much, much nicer than I am, Billy. It wouldn't be fair for anyone so tired and cross—and tired—and unreasonable—and *tired*——"

"You poor little thing! Run upstairs and get to bed, and to-morrow I'll come take you to dinner, and maybe you'll feel better!" the man said tenderly, concernedly. "And

after Christmas, when you've had time to think it all out——"

"Billy dear, it doesn't need any thinking out. I know exactly how I feel!"

"And you like your old boy pretty well, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. But not enough to—to make him unhappy—or marry him in a hurry and perhaps have him sorry——"

It was all murmured with her lips touching his big, hard, cold, fresh-shaven cheek, with his arm about her, so that the effect of the words was entirely lost. Juanita knew it; was too tired to care. He was so strong; so well groomed and dressed, so comfortably rested and warm. And she was jaded and tousled and exhausted and cold and tired and cross. She could only cling to him.

It wasn't fair to have all the disadvantage on her side! Juanita reflected, creeping upstairs. The house was draughty and cold, there was no hot water, her bed felt flat and lifeless.

She lay awake for a while, thinking. If life had been so patently unfair to a girl, could the girl be blamed if she seized, not too scrupulously, any chance advantage offered by life?

What if Billy were only a sentimental boy, hardly out of college, entertaining no more serious idea of marriage than that it would give him unlimited opportunities to kiss the girl he loved, to have her to himself? There was no reason to suppose that he would not develop as time went on.

She would make him happy, too. She could play the game just as cleverly as his mother had played it. He would never suspect that he was not the most blindly adored of men.

Well, and she *did* love him. As much as anyone could love a big, undeveloped, amusement-loving boy, whose mind and soul were hardly awake. Nobody could help loving Billy, everybody liked him.

Juanita shook the whole thing away from her impatiently,

turned and turned restlessly in the dark winter night, and arose, when the alarm clock shrilled at seven the next morning, still troubled, still vaguely ashamed.

That evening, when she met him for dinner, she was radiant, and her mood being instantly, with a pathetic eagerness, reflected in his own, they spent one of the most felicitous of all their happy times together.

The girl wore a new hat, a drooping velvet tam of peacock-blue velvet; her little slip of a silk dress was shabby, her gloves and shoes were shabby, her coat was shabby.

But coat and gloves were slipped off, as she sank into her seat, and frock and shoes were almost out of sight. The new hat—she had paid three dollars for it at the Mayfair, it was a regular four-forty-three, she told Billy seriously—was just the colour of her deep and shining eyes, her cheeks were apricot-velvet, her mouth all laughter.

The head waiter at the Fairmont led them to their favourite place; the big room was filled now, it was after seven o'clock. And Rudy, the beloved violinist, came to their table.

"I'm playing something for you to-night, Miss Espinosa," said Rudy.

Juanita was speechless with pleasure and excitement.

It was the next selection: amorous, dreamy, familiar.

> Nita, Juanita, ask thy soul if we must part—
> Nita, Juanita, rest thou on my heart!

The softly lighted, gracious big room rocked with the beautiful old-fashioned beauty of it.

> Soft, o'er the fountain, lingering falls the southern moon,
> Far, on the mountain, breaks the day, too soon . . . .

Billy, completely carried away by the happiness of the hour, leaned on the little table.

"Nita, I love you so!"

"I know you do, Billy, and I want you to, dear."

"But, then, why can't we get married, darling? Think of it! A big room upstairs here in the Fairmont, and just you and me, sauntering about for a while, and then going upstairs, and books and a fire! I want you to myself, baby girl. I get so jealous of every dam' Babbitt who goes into that store to buy a necktie."

"But marriage is more than that, Billy. It's years and years—twenty, maybe forty. And everyone would say I grabbed the rich man's son."

He made to this the only answer that could have appealed to her.

"Well, that would be true, in a way, too," he mused.

"Billy Chatterton!" she exclaimed, outraged. But she liked it just the same, and liked the ruminative, surprised tone in which he went on: "You can't deny my father is rich, Nita?"

"Well, exactly. And as if it mattered what they say!" she said, in relief. A little later she said: "Perhaps it's never having been married before that makes me wonder if I feel all that a girl could—or should—or *might* feel."

"Leave it to me!" Billy said, "you'll be the craziestly happy——"

"Billy, what a word!"

"Well, I mean it. The craziestly happy wife——"

"I know," she presently said dreamily. "But it doesn't seem real, somehow!"

In the darkness of the moving-picture theatre, an hour later, he asked her if she had ever "liked" another "boy."

Juanita had to fight a little sense of affront before she answered him. It was just the well-recognized paucity of the collegian's vocabulary, of course, but these were the terms of children in their teens.

"Do you mean was I ever in love with anyone, Billy?"

"Yep."

"I had a sort of fancy for Kent Ferguson, once."

She was glad to have to say it; she had felt for some weeks that it ought to be said.

"Oh, I knew that! At least, I used to think the old boy had a case on you!" Billy said easily.

Juanita experienced an enormous relief. He wasn't going to be jealous! Now, if she could but safely weather the next question or two——

But Billy, fortunately, took the personal attitude, as, knowing Billy, she told herself she might have expected him to.

"Was Kent as crazy about you as I am?"

"Oh, good heavens, no!"

"Did he take you to tea and buy you casket-sized bunches of violets?"

"Indeed he didn't!"

"To hell with him, then!" said Billy very amiably, dropping the subject indifferently. And when he spoke again it was while leaning close to her ear, his arm across her shoulders. "Do you love me, darling? Kiss me, then. No, *kiss* me. I love you so much! Do you think anything else matters except that I'm crazy about you, Nita, and I want my girl!"

"That's just what I don't know!" she said whimsically.

"Do you know that no man ever loved his wife in this world as much as I'm going to love you!"

"But that isn't all of it, dear."

"Well, it's dam' near all of it, now let me tell you! And as for you not throwing yourself into my arms, and acting as crazy as I do, it suits me down to the ground! There are too many of these girls going around, ready to grab a man by the back hair and yank him out to the City Hall! You suit me—you're nine million times too good for me. But I'll make you love me, Nita, you see if I don't!"

"My mother used to say that the real feeling, in a girl, doesn't come until afterward, anyway."

"And your mother was right!"

Perhaps so. But Juanita herself felt all wrong—all wrong—all wrong. She would not call herself engaged to Billy.

"No, if we're engaged you'd have to tell your mother. And then it would be hard to break it."

"Well," in blank astonishment at her vagaries, "why do we want to break it?"

"We don't, of course. But something might happen."

What happened, however, was that on a soft February day that was all green grass and blue sky, she was discharged from the Mayfair. There was a change in managership and nearly everyone was dismissed. Some of the girls were glad, some despairing; Juanita merely upset. She could apply for other jobs, of course.

She met Billy at one o'clock and ruefully showed him gray strips of want advertisements, cut from the morning papers. Billy's face flushed, his eyes glittered, he wanted her to come straight to his mother.

But, turning a little pale, she said she couldn't do that. An hour later he wrote his mother a letter, on the hotel stationery. He drove Juanita to the City Hall, and then to a quiet parish house, next door to old Saint Mary's, under whose big cross they had so often watched the lights of Chinatown. And there they were married.

However inconspicuously handled, the name of William Carwood Chatterton was not one to be long hidden. The morning papers held a surprise for society in the city, and its fashionable suburbs down the Peninsula.

Friends of the family will be surprised to hear of the quiet marriage, yesterday afternoon [said the newspapers] of Billy Chatterton, the popular young son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Carwood Chatterton, of

San Mateo, and Miss Maria Juanita Espinosa. Miss Espinosa, who is a beautiful girl, is a Californian, daughter of the late Mrs. Maria Espinosa, of the rancho of Los Amigos, in Monterey County, and a descendant of one of California's pioneer Spanish families. Mr. and Mrs. Chatterton, whose plans came as a complete surprise to their families as well as their most intimate friends, are spending their honeymoon in the southern part of the state.

CHAPTER XIX

THE day, her wedding day, was like a queer, confusing dream. No hour of it, after the breakfast hour, and the usual walk downtown, was normal for Juanita. Immediately upon reaching the Mayfair, the strangeness began, and it deepened and ramified until the girl felt that life could never return to anything like order again.

The Mayfair was established in double stores in Market Street, its large display windows painted brilliant red. These windows were choked with small merchandise: handkerchiefs were fluted up the columns, saucepans and bottles of ink, sheet music and toothpaste, grouped about their bases. Usually, when Juanita arrived, at half-past eight in the morning, coloured men were sweeping masses of rubbish slowly along the aisles and washing the black and white tiling at the doors. Early comers were folding up the long reaches of muslin that had covered the stock all night, yawning, and coughing in the dust, as they did so.

This morning she had a notice to call at Mr. Bladd's office; not an entirely unprecedented thing. Sometimes Mr. Bladd sent for a girl if he wanted to make a change in a department; twice he had so sent for Juanita lately, once somewhat puzzling her by showing her his wife's picture and dwelling upon his devotion to his wife. He had followed this by the statement that Mrs. Bladd liked him occasionally to take "one of the young ladies" from the store to dinner.

"And leave me say," Mr. Bladd had concluded, with a significant look, "I can give a girl as good a time as the next one!"

Juanita had listened to this respectfully, looking at him with some wonderment. What was he talking about?

"If a girl come to me," Mr. Bladd had added, "and says something like this, 'Rupert, I'm sick of thirty-cent table d'hôtes, I'd like to eat once off of somebody but myself!' that girl would of picked the right feller."

"Thank you. Was that all?" Juanita asked. Walking away she had wondered why any man should send for a busy clerk to tell her funny, vague things like that.

The second time had been different. It had been almost dusk, some of the girls had gone home when Mr. Bladd had sent for Juanita the second time. He had asked her to sit down, had smiled in a rather disquieting way as he assured her there was "no rush."

Well, what was she doing to-night? his questions had surprisingly begun. His wife was in Gloverdale with her mother. Devoted to her mother. He kinder felt like a good dinner and a show to-night, himself. How about it?

Juanita had suddenly and disgustedly realized that this fat, oily little man was merely attempting what she had learned to call "mashing." Lots of men did it, strange as it seemed to a girl. What satisfaction they derived from making her uncomfortable with ogling and winking in a street car, why they would linger in the store aisles, wasting their elaborately arch looks upon a flushed and annoyed saleswoman, she never could satisfactorily explain to herself.

However, they did it, and now Mr. Bladd was doing it. She felt her cheeks grow hot with nervousness, and when he tried to remain between her and the door and caught at her hand, she spoke so suddenly, so loudly and affrightedly, that Mr. Ballow came in. Mr. Ballow was usually gone at this time; he was sixty, and not well. However, by good fortune, he was in the adjoining office to-night.

When he abruptly entered, with his shrewd old eyes upon

the assistant manager, Juanita disappeared. And she did not see Mr. Bladd again until he sent for her to fire her.

Even then he wanted to get her address, in case "anything turned up," but she did not give it. She returned to the aisles of harmonicas and combs and school tablets and green and red and blue glass rings with what spirit she might, and at eleven she cashed her pay check and left the Mayfair behind her.

It was "fun" to be walking free and idle in the warm spring streets at eleven o'clock, anyway. The washed sidewalks were not dried yet, on the shady side, and the cable cars, so crowded when she came downtown at eight, were almost empty. The streets seemed wide, and spacious, and cool, at least until she had walked farther uptown and was among the morning shoppers. At half-past twelve, she was to lunch with Billy.

Two of the girls at the Mayfair had told her of possible positions, but both, upon investigation, appeared to have been filled. When one had a job, Juanita mused, the world seemed full of empty jobs, golden opportunities. But the instant one was anxiously seeking one again, how the doors closed!

She met Billy for luncheon quite in her ordinary manner. They had had their oysters and were busy with chicken, before she told him. He immediately became excited, rather to her distress. Damn the damn old junk shop anyway, he said hotly. Juanita, although much less violent, assured him that she was not in the least nervous—she would easily find a better job than that of the old Mayfair.

Quite suddenly, they were discussing marriage. Just how it began she could not remember afterward, but there it was between them, Billy leaning across the table, murmuring, Juanita looking down, hardly speaking in reply. Now or never—now or never—said the confused hammering of her heart.

Why not? Why not? She could go out now, tell the people at her boarding house. He could stop in at the office for a moment. They could go together to the City Hall—why not?

She was at Miss Duval's again, running up the smelly stairway.

"Who is zat?" called the boarding-house keeper's worn, sweet voice.

"Juanita, Mademoiselle!"

"Oh, *chérie,* at zis hour?"

Juanita, suitcase in hand, went into the kitchen. They were unfolding the wet, satiny leaves of parboiled cabbages. There would be *chou farci* for Thursday supper. The air smelled strongly of onions and cabbage and soup meat and garbage and warm soapy dish-water.

She might not be back for several days, the girl explained. She would write Mademoiselle. Eh, *bien,* the Frenchwoman consented, with a shrewd look. But she knew what she was doing, eh?

Juanita kissed her. "I'm going to be married!" she whispered into the lean, dark neck.

So confided, it sounded thrilling. But the City Hall episode frightened her a little. She was very quiet when she and Billy got back into the car. They drove straight down to old Saint Mary's, and Billy parked his car outside of one of the gaudy shops of Chinatown when they went into the clergy house.

A Paulist, aged, silver-headed, the elbows of his old cassock worn through, duly married them, and a brisk housekeeper, evidently accustomed to the service, wiped her big, clean Irish hand and witnessed the deed. The bare, clean-smelling, poor-smelling parlour, furnished by a cottage organ, an artificial palm, and eleven chairs, was the scene of their wedding, and during the ceremony Juanita was conscious only of a constant frightened prayer in her heart, "Oh, God, make

me good—make me good—make me good——" and the occasional intrusion upon her sense of hearing of a cable car labouring up California Street outside.

Billy kissed her, whispered something, she did not know what. She smiled up at him blindly. Her first act, as a bride, was to slip for a few minutes into the big church next door. There were candles burning among pussy willows on the altar, little gold gasps of flame among the brown stems and the silver-gray buds. Juanita buried her face in her hands—she was too confused to pray.

Then they went out, and Billy, trembling with a sort of triumphant delight, wanted to buy her a wedding present! *Please.* He knew exactly what it was to be—a fur coat, and a little fur hat to pull down over her eyes.

"Billy, dear, I don't want any wedding present!"

"Ah, but *please!* I want so to give you one!"

After all, the bewilderment in her heart and soul were eased just a little by knowing him to be so happy. She was utterly compliant in the dim, big, luxurious fur store.

The coat, long, flexible, silken lined, enchanting, was of silver-gray fur, and the cap, mingled with her bright hair, gave her shy, delighted eyes so angelic an expression that the saleswoman remarked frankly that she ought to be in the movies. Mrs. Chatterton's other coat and hat would please be sent to the San Mateo address, Billy directed, quite composedly. Juanita's startled glance flew to him, and her colour rushed up. The saleswomen discussed them as the "bride and groom" all day, on the strength of that one look.

"And now," said Billy, when they went out to the car again and she established herself in the front seat, "next stop Pebble Beach! There won't be a soul there. We'll love it!" The car moved smoothly out the long stretch of the Park, along the beach road, they were running smoothly and swiftly down the Peninsula—past Burlingame, and San Mateo,

through whose thinned trees Juanita could see the stately spread of the Chatterton mansion, up against the low line of the hills.

"This is Wednesday," Billy meditated aloud. "On Friday or Saturday we'll come up and see Mother and Dad!"

He was happy. He was chattering like the boy he was: of golf to-morrow, huh? Juanita would learn in no time; of surprising everybody; of wedding presents—they would get rafts, he prophesied, when people found out they were married.

How young he was! It was part of his youth to be going to Pebble Beach. Honeymoons and Pebble Beach were associated in his mind like pepper and salt, or stocks and bonds.

"This is a terrible mistake, this is a terrible mistake, this is a terrible mistake——" How long had some frightening voice been repeating that, over and over again, in her heart? It seemed to have been ding-donging there for a long, long time. "This is a terrible mistake!"

Juanita knew that it was true. But why? Why? she asked her panic-stricken soul feverishly. Why was it a mistake?

"This is a terrible mistake. You never should have married him. This is a terrible mistake."

She was hearing it so loudly that she could hear nothing else. But what could she do now, tucked up here on the seat beside him, racing toward Pebble Beach, toward her marriage night? What could she do?

Perhaps, Juanita mused, all brides felt like this; perhaps the fuss and flurry of a big wedding were devised especially to keep them from misgivings and doubts. Rush them, fatigue them, stun them into matrimony, and then leave them to discover for themselves how right, how happy and sane it all was, afterward.

To-morrow she would probably be quite happy and normal.

But she could not think of to-morrow, the fearful problem of to-day was too close.

Was there, then, really such a thing as love, the love of a woman for a man? Apart from mere passion, was there something—something that she should be feeling for Billy now, something that she knew she did not feel? Thrill, confidence, fear because she loved so much, delight because she could give so much? Might the bride of a few hours feel something of that, instead of this half-confused, half-ashamed emotion that was suffocating her, this sense of cheating and acting and mere passive enduring?

But all this worrying was frightful; it must be morbid. She tried to shake herself free of it, to be interested in the towns through which they ran, to face the situation sensibly. Marriage *was* a serious thing, to a motherless girl, especially a sudden marriage. Yet marriage was a natural state, too, and in a few weeks—in a few weeks——

Her throat thickened, her heart began a quite irrational hammering, fast and alarming. "This is a terrible mistake, this is a terrible mistake," the steady voice within her said again. "You should never have married him. This is a terrible mistake."

"Nonsense!" she told herself hardily, deep in her soul, as she smiled at him from the luxurious depths of her furs. "This is idiotic. You'll go through with it with dignity, as millions of other women do. You like him thoroughly, you'll come to love him before you knew it, and you can make him utterly and entirely happy. Just stop thinking of nothing but yourself and your own silly notions! You're tired and excited.

"I can't believe that it was only this morning that that odious Bladd fired me," she said aloud, to say something. Somehow it was unbelievably difficult to say affectionate things, sentimental things to him to-day. She felt a strong inclination to avoid anything like that; even the most casual

endearment, even the word "dear" or "darling" was dragged out of her with an effort. It was ridiculous, and it was maddening, but her emotions, her thoughts, her very words and voice, did not seem to be under her control.

"Do you love your husband?" Billy asked, in answer.

She could smile, but it was with a sort of sickness in her heart. What was the matter with her? Was she going to be ill? A horrible sense of woodenness, of stiffness, possessed her.

Well, she would have to go through the hours with dignity, if with a total absence of any emotion except endurance. She could smile, she could look her prettiest in her one evening gown, she could at least not make him unhappy. Juanita, in her disturbed soul, tried to pray.

But she could not pray. A dryness, a dullness, possessed her. Prayers stopped, fell lifeless of their own weight. She remembered herself, only this morning, asking for positions, in the big department stores, cutting gray strips of advertisements from the newspapers, and for that self she could feel a sudden envy, a rush of regret.

"This is a terrible mistake. This is a terrible mistake."

They had left San Francisco at two o'clock; it was six when they came in sight of the wrinkled, gray level of the twilight sea, and the crouching cypresses about the Pebble Beach shores. Sea and shore were indeed blended in the half lights, and the beautiful rooms in which Juanita found herself presently, taking off the fur hat, were exquisite with the soft dying reflection of the water that was just below their windows.

They would have the little Inn to themselves; there were no other patrons at the moment, except the few dinner guests who would drift over from Monterey and Del Monte every night. But there was no dance to-night, Juanita heard the tall, dark man explaining, but she immediately forgot why.

She and Billy had two enormous rooms, rooms facing the

sea, beyond a narrow slope of lawn and pines, and showing the curve of the shore, below the cliffs where the golf links were, and to Carmel beyond.

And miles, miles below Carmel Mission lay the old Mission of San Esteban, on the swift-running coffee-brown Amigos, and beyond that again, only a short mile, the rancho, with the peppers and eucalyptus shedding their leaves upon the deserted pipe-tile roofs of the patio, and the sea gulls walking there like doves.

One of the rooms, attached to two spacious baths, was the bedroom, with twin beds painted green, with flowers stencilled on them in rich dull reds and gold, and flounced with apricot and lavender silk. The lamps wore petticoats of apricot and lavender, and the windows were hung with the same colour, over their spotlessly fresh little muslin curtains. Beautiful knobbed walnut in the dressing table and chiffonier and chairs; a deep, beautiful chaise longue, restfully black, with fat round pillows ruffled narrowly in apricot and lavender. Glass plates over real lace, little switches to flood any corner of the room with light, magazines waiting, fat, snowy towels, little towels monogrammed in cross stitch and baskets of roses.

The second room was a sitting room, where one might have breakfast upstairs. It had a balcony, over the sea; it was a beautiful room, Juanita and Billy investigating it conceded, with Japanese cabinets and Japanese wall paper all temples and bridges and black and gold lacquer, and heavy oriental rugs, and teakwood furniture, and jars and tapestries, all Japanese. Even the windows here were set in deep carved black frames, and moved sideways, like *shoji*. Juanita laughed suddenly when Billy said fervently: "Let's hope they don't serve bitter green tea and rice cakes for breakfast!"

Encouraged by her laugh, perhaps feeling vaguely that she was not quite in his own wild mood of triumph and delight, he put his arm about her and said boyishly:

"You do love me, don't you, Juanita?"

"Of course," she whispered, looking at the fur button of his big driving coat, that she was twisting against his breast.

"Frightened?" he asked.

"A little," she admitted, looking up.

"You don't have to be frightened of me," he said.

"It's all so confusing and exciting," she reminded him. "That nice housekeeper a few minutes ago, calling me 'Mrs. Chatterton'——"

"Ah, you'll have to get used to that!" he assured her joyfully.

The first consideration was baths, and the second, as it was seven o'clock, dinner. There were a few other persons dining in the room, but not one tenth the number it would easily have accommodated, and the effect was of emptiness and isolation.

They murmured long over their meal, and afterward Juanita, with a little shy satisfaction that Billy found enchanting, put on her soft new coat of silvery squirrel skins, and pulled down the little cap, and they walked in the calm winter moonlight. He showed her the links, the tennis courts, and some of the nearer cottages, whose owners he knew.

When they came back to the empty lobby, she paused for a moment, perhaps merely to pause, not to move on toward the hours ahead of her, beside the framed photographs that were hung there: big photographs, of fox hunts, of polo teams, of golf matches. Billy looked over her shoulder, identifying some of the men; the only one in which Juanita discovered figures that she knew he did not see until they had stood so, idly inspecting the groups, for a full minute or two.

"And look there," he said suddenly, "that's Kent Ferguson —on that horse. They had a paper chase here, a year ago last October, just before my mother went East—that's Mother, beside him, and here's my father—they all came down here for two or three days."

Juanita remembered those days. The time of the big tide at Solito.

"Kent rides like anything," Billy observed. "You can tell by the way a feller sits if he's accustomed to a horse."

They went upstairs. And Juanita turned, just inside their door, and from the depths of a heart sick with misgivings and nameless apprehensions, laying her hand on his lapel, began merely:

"Billy?"

"Yes, I know, dear," he said instantly, stooping to kiss her lightly, where the fur hat met the bright hair. "I'm going out for a smoke!"

When he came upstairs, more than half an hour later, he thought her asleep. She was tired, she had been nervous and unlike herself during the latter hours of the day, he knew; she was lying now as relaxed as a child, one hand flung out, palm upward, her beautiful hair in a loose soft braid on the pillow, her breath even, her lashes lying on the exquisite peach bloom of her cheeks.

Yet long after he was healthily and wearily asleep himself, her blue eyes were sleepless, wide open, searching the soft shadows of the apricot and lavender room, searching tomorrow—the next day, the next, for escape.

Billy was blotted out completely, his good nature, his boyish affection and eagerness, the limitations of his conversation, the triumph in his manner to-day, by that one glimpse of another man's figure, pictured on a big horse.

Kent's hat had been pulled down in riding, he had worn the very golf suit in which Juanita had first seen him. He was smiling in the picture, how well she knew that oddly reluctant, oddly sweet smile, that so changed the dark face! Kent.

About the mere thought of him there was reality, she seemed to be awakening from a troubled, bewildered dream. Instantly, she seemed to be only Juanita Espinosa, not a diplomat, an actress, a blunderer, but a girl like other

girls, destined simply for the normal living and loving of life.

It was terrible to return to the truth. Terrible to find that this thing she was doing was not true: that it was not true to be here in Billy Chatterton's room, married to him, with that other man alive in the world. Juanita tried to face what she must face, tried to imagine the future in which she must live on cheerfully, busily, receive callers, pour tea, buy frocks—always meeting Billy with a smile, always acting.

It could be done. Women had done this, living brave lies all through the slow years, and she must be one of them Spontaneous joy, the richness of loving, were not for her. She would be beloved, and she knew that she would not be unhappy. If she might not have the deep, glorious passion of which all girls dream, at least she would have everything else.

Suppose this were still her marriage night, she mused, but to Kent? The blood rushed to her heart, her senses swam in a sudden vertigo of terror and joy.

But this was sheer madness. She would think of Billy. They would have happy days together, wandering southward through the autumn days, laughing at everything, eating delicious meals, watching the sea.

The sea! Her own blue, wrinkled Pacific. She wished that her honeymoon had not brought her to the sea. With the thought came self-blame, definite and sharp at last. It had been wrong to consent to this marriage, wrong to let him think she cared.

Kent, carelessly astride a big horse, jumbled into a group photograph with a score of other riders. Their few hours together came creeping back; laconic and silent, he walked at her side on the way home from church again, again she was going about the Chatterton house, knowing that any turn of the hallway or stairs might bring them face to face. His voice always so careless, his brief, pregnant phrases, and

that he had cared enough for her pleasure to buy an English picnic box—these things returned, significant and exquisitely painful.

After a while she slept, but she was awake in the dawn, dressing with the caution of a thief, creeping downstairs for a walk on the shore. She went back to the Inn at nine to awaken Billy, but he was almost dressed, and the odd day began with them being very felicitous, very conversational, at breakfast.

Afterward she had her first golf lesson. He was patient; the Scotsman who taught her how to hold her clubs and tried to teach her how to drive was patience itself. But after half an hour she preferred to follow Billy about, content in his content, and glad to be free to look off the cliffs at the sea, and the curve of beach beyond Carmel, and the gulls that flew about the course.

Luncheon, and she was still all companionable gaiety and sweetness. And in the afternoon they walked into Monterey, to buy silly baskets and abalone shell souvenirs, pins and pocket knives. A man from the hotel would bring Billy's car to a given spot at a given hour; they were to drive on down to Santa Maria, to Santa Barbara, to-night, unless they decided to stop one night at Del Monte. Meanwhile, they might roam about the crooked streets, stopping whenever a wonderful old adobe wall, or a pink-tiled roof, brought the girl up short with an exclamation that was half pleasure and half pain.

And suddenly, Juanita knew that she must leave him, that if ever she was to love him at all, it could not come to her in this mood, when every word was forced and uneasy, when every thought of her confused mind was turning forever to another man. This was unendurable. She felt as if she were losing her mind. It was all unreal—all unnatural. Did she like Billy, did she not like him? She could not tell.

She only knew that she must escape. While she was so close to him, while they were so united, yet so many hopeless miles apart, she could neither think nor act sanely.

"Billy, dear," she said feverishly, when they were walking toward the car, at four o'clock, "you must forgive me. I can't—I can't go on with it."

The stricken look he turned toward her shamed her. It was more than surprise or disappointment that darkened his blue eyes. He looked as if he might have guessed, as if he had felt, that this was coming.

"Juanita, why?" he asked blankly.

"Billy, forgive me. After a while—after a few days, when I've had time to think," she said incoherently. "Believe me, I wouldn't do this if I weren't so wretched—so utterly—I don't know what."

"But, Juanita, don't you trust me?" he asked boyishly. "You can trust me. I'll do anything you like—you know that. But we're married—we're *married*, you know."

He was so much a boy, after all. He was trying so hard to be manly, to be master of the situation.

"Billy, darling, you'll have to let me go! I'm heartbroken about it—I don't ask you to forgive me. But let me have my way in this or I think I shall go mad. It's my fault, Billy. I knew—dearly as I loved you—dearly as I loved you!—that it wasn't the right love. That he"—she said, very low—"was always there."

"Kent," he stated, rather than asked slowly. And there was silence.

They were standing near the bay, where the scattered fishing fleet was coming in, and where the shore was cluttered with old boats lying upside down, half buried in sand, with trawls and nets, dories, the drifted rubbish of fish scales and coconut shells thick on the tide line. Humble little collapsing huts huddled together toward the west; the sunset was red and low on them, finding out their shabbiness; their

small crooked windows where flowers bloomed in pots, their walls patched with rusty squares of tin, their ropes of forlorn and miscellaneous clothing. Beyond rose the walls of the canneries, sheltered by the rough jetty, and the stagnant pool it enclosed.

"As long as you like," Billy said bluntly, his young face red, "we'll just be—friends, if that's what you mean."

"It's not quite, dear," she said eagerly, apologetically, tender for his bewilderment and hurt. "It's just that I want —that I must have, time to think, to be alone! I'm half sick now with worry and doubt. Give me my way, Billy dear, and I'll send for you, I'll come to you, one of these days. And I'll love you so for understanding me now!"

"There is no reason why you should go," he said impatiently, discontentedly. "I know I've rushed you, I know you're tired. You're all tired out, anyway, from that cursed store. But why do you want to leave me?"

He was so kind—so young—so stupid, the girl thought feverishly. She made one desperate effort to rally her self-control, to force herself to be reasonable.

"It seems to me that I could rest—that I could think better alone," she offered. Her heart seemed to die within her when she saw his hopeful look.

"Get in," he directed, and she got into the car. "Now, you know, Juanita," Billy said, driving slowly in the direction of Del Monte, "I don't believe one bit of that Kent talk. It's the bunk. He had a kind of a mushy way with girls, and they all got crazy about him."

"I suppose so," she made herself agree faintly, as he paused.

"Now, the thing you need," Billy pursued, encouraged, "is to come with me to the Hotel Del Monte, go to bed, get a good night's rest, have your breakfast upstairs, if you want to—you don't have to worry about me. I'll play golf to-

morrow, I'll play billiards, or bridge, if I can get hold of someone to play with, to-night. And we can do that for two weeks, if you say so," he reasoned. "I don't have to be back for two weeks, anyway."

Juanita wondered, with a sort of suppressed agony, what was the matter with her? Why couldn't she act like a reasonable human being? Never in her life before had she had any sympathy with the girls of whom it was assumed, in plays and books, that they could not marry this man, couldn't marry that one. When the welfare and happiness of their families depended upon it, that heroine had always seemed not only selfish but weak, to plead that she simply couldn't—she would rather die!—but she couldn't marry the Earl.

Yesterday and to-day had taught Juanita something new: that marriage had its psychological side, that sometimes even tolerance, even generous and unselfish giving, might not be forced.

After a while, perhaps, after a few weeks! But now, now she felt like some earth creature being held under water. She could not breathe.

She couldn't enter this big hotel, take possession of other rooms, hear the music playing as she walked downstairs to dinner, face Billy across another meal.

"You idiot," she breathed to herself angrily, "what does it matter! What if you don't love him, what if you're not happy, must you be a fool?"

Yet the wretchedness, the rapid beating of her heart, the almost dizzy sense of unreality, the consciousness of dishonesty, of play-acting, persisted. She couldn't—she couldn't—she couldn't go on with it.

"If you would just be perfectly simple and natural, make him happy, enjoy this wonderful place, think less of yourself," she argued. And she began to pray, "O God, help me! Help me!"

Billy had slightly missed the road, explaining that he inevitably did so at this point. The right-hand road led about the curve to the hotel, the left-hand down toward a windmill, a confusion of immense dark trees and interlaced roads that was always puzzling, especially in so dim a light. He had taken the left, by some chance.

A train had come in, was standing three hundred feet away in the little station, steaming, its bell ringing. The hotel bus was waiting, Billy explained that if they were quick they would be well in their rooms before the lumbering old bus made its way to the hotel, half a mile back in the tangle of trees.

"There's a road back of the windmill here—wait a minute, I'll ask that kid," he muttered, peering into the dusk.

He had stopped. He was out of the car, and running toward a workman, who was walking a bicycle slowly along a path, perhaps a hundred feet away.

Instantly Juanita had her suitcase in her hand. She was crazy—he might have her arrested! This was idiotic—the train might not start for twenty minutes. He would know where she was, he would bring her back——

She was in the train, an odorous little coal train, with velvet seats upon which a few weary passengers were writhing and slipping. The car was lighted by old-fashioned lamps, dimly lighted.

Juanita was barely in her seat when it moved. She felt herself becoming hysterical, sobs were struggling with an insane inclination toward laughter. It was moving—moving—it was sending the cry of its desolate whistle over Monterey.

Dusky woods, bare stretches of shore and sea, woods again. They were moving, they were gathering speed.

She jumped nervously. The conductor was beside her. Instantly, looking up composedly into his fine, strong, sixty-year-old face, she was herself. She opened her purse, watch-

ing the strip ticket he punched. He tucked it into the brass binding of the velvet seat ahead. "Thank you," Juanita murmured, as he went on with his lamp.

Insanity. But she was free! Oh, the deliciousness of it, after thirty hours of prison! Free.

Anything could come now, any arrangements be made. Perhaps she would go to him, penitently, in a few weeks, perhaps she would say:

"Billy, you've been so patient. But here I am! I was tired, I was hysterical. I didn't know my own mind. Seeing Kent's picture that night, at Pebble Beach, and being so weary and confused, must have made me light-headed. You give me everything, I give you nothing—and I've been cruel to you. But I'm sorry."

Clack-clackety. Clack-clackety. Almost dark outside now, but she could still make out the shadowy masses that were woods, and see the twilight and starshine mingling on the sea.

Solito, at half-past seven. She did not dare go into the hotel—old Fernandez would know her. There was a brightly new little delicacy store on Junipera Serra Avenue; Juanita entered it, bought cookies, sandwiches, with a trembling sense of adventure. It had occurred to her that the rancho might be entirely deserted. A forlorn little muddy car, with "Taxi" written large upon it, was outside. Did he know the Espinosa rancho?

"Yes'm. Down the Amigos road, out toward the old San Esteban Mission, ain't it?" the man asked alertly. He stored her luggage as if he were glad to do it.

They were all so kind. The girl that put her sandwiches in a bag, this friendly man who rattled her along the beloved road so rapidly. She could hear her sea crying to her—crying to her in the dark.

CHAPTER XX

A YEAR, more than a whole year since she had lived at the rancho, a contented, innocent, busy, eager girl. Now she was what? Nameless, married, and yet no wife, troubled in soul, disgraced—perhaps to be divorced, creeping back again under cover of the autumn night, laughing, crying, as she paid her taxi man and sent him away.

And yet the old odours met her with the old welcome: the odour of the garden, moss roses, and wet bitter-sweet chrysanthemums, the smell of the peppers, the eucalyptus, the cornfields, the orchards where the purple prunes were drying. The smell of cows, of barns, of wood smoke.

"Lola!" It was a high, desperate cry, the cry of a homing gull. "Lolita! Somebody!"

Suppose the rancho were sold, only strangers there? What then? But, no, this dog nuzzling her hand knew her—leaped to thrust a wet tongue at her face.

The door of Lola's cabin opened upon redness, opened upon cries.

"The Señorita! Holy Infant in His Mother's arms be near us all! Luis—Tony—the Señorita!"

She was in their arms, she was laughing, crying, clinging to the children, kissing the once-disgraced Dolores, breathing in again the delicious warm atmosphere of onion and garlic cookery, of sour bread and sour wine and sour baby bottles and sour baby beds.

They made her eat, her big fur coat flung carelessly upon a chair already burdened with overalls and aprons and pink

dry peppers and baskets and ropes, her fur cap pushed back on the flyaway gold hair, so that she might better see them all—feast her eyes on them.

"I'm back! I can sleep in the hacienda——"

"But why not! The Saviour protect us, weren't Lolita and I airing it, a few days ago? It is sold, the rancho—the Señorita knew that?"

It was sold. Her radiant face fell almost absurdly into blankness. She put down her coffee cup, stared at them.

"But what matter, Señorita? The Blessed Mother's hand was in it. The buyer wishes all to be as it now is, wishes us to remain with Tony to dispose of the calves and the skins and the fruit, even as to-day!"

"Who are they?" the girl asked. Whoever they were, she could come to terms with them, after a few days. The three Doloreses did not know. But the place was sold.

"Didn't they—the new buyers, come down and walk over it? Don't they know anything about it?" she asked.

"Never one, Señorita. It is Tony's opinion," said the old woman, "that they have bought it but to sell it again, as a deal. Eighteen thousand is all they paid—for half the county, and all the stock, was it not absurd?"

Lamp held above Lolita's head, they all stepped out into the dear, familiar barnyard, to escort the Señorita to the house. The light made shadows leap from fences and the corners of the barns. The pale moonlight retreated before it. Juanita looked off, her heart swelling, to the meadows, and the silent oaks, the silent haycocks, the pale glimmer of the sea beyond, and her soul tasted infinite peace. Oh, whatever mistakes she had made, for whatever stupidities she would have to answer, she could right them here! Here were peace, and cool soft fragrant airs on her flushed face, and the sea, and home.

She saw the big looming shadow of the windmill, and heard its lazy creak, in the high dark, and the drip of water; a cow

blundered about a corner, slumped off into the gloom, the wheels of the big hay wagon sent revolving shadows on the hard-packed earth, as the light moved by. A calf said "bla-a-a-?" with an interrogative note, and a mother cow answered with that softly poured phantom "moo" that is only a breath.

Luis and Tony had preceded them to the old hacienda by a good half hour; there were fires going, there was afoot a clumsy attempt to sweep the Señorita's room. Lola banished them, when rugs had been laid, and the four women busied themselves with sheets, pillows, blankets.

Old Lola herself would, of course, sleep in the poor Señora's room; Lolita would be over at eight to get the Señorita's breakfast. Juanita's protests were in vain. They would make her comfortable, and they succeeded in seeing her, the poor motherless child! cry for very joy.

To kneel at the mouldering old bookcases and pick out one of the dear old books, to have her green-shaded lamp, on the table with the scalloped crochet mat on it, to say her prayers at the old window, looking out into the garden, once more—that garden that swam to-night—willows, cactus, pampas grass, brick paths, and tipsy rose bushes, in a bath of soft, fuzzy moonlight, was to feel in her heart so deep and so thankful a peace that she could believe herself once more a little girl, confident that somehow the morrow would take care of the morrow's troubles.

The country air crept in, cold, sharp, sweet from the sea. And Juanita turned on the old pillow, and shut off the lamp, and sank miles—miles, into a heaven-sent, a dreamless sleep.

The next day, and the day after, she was her old self. There was even an enveloping, dark-blue apron, washed and ironed and laid away in the walnut bureau with the round knobs, for her to wear. She bunched her bright hair severely back, armed herself with a broom.

Lola and Lolita were in ecstasies. What if the new owner

should suddenly appear, the women told each other valiantly, what were they doing except put the place in order for him?

Juanita perceived that the three Doloreses had lapsed into peasant indolence, that they had lacked direction. Evidently a large crop of grapes and tomatoes, with side issues of onions and peppers, represented their chief interest for the year. They welcomed her return; there was a fire in the old kitchen range again, a rubbish heap burned all day, among the soft blue lights and shadows, the hazy spring gauze that veiled the yard.

Sweeping, straightening, tiring herself gloriously, drinking deep of the crystal well water, biting childishly into the cold, juicy apples that were so casually stored in the spring house, Juanita kept one eye on the road that led to the old Mission, across the Amigos, to the Solito road.

When Billy's car came down that road, she would meet him at the gate, beyond the dry corn stalks, she would put her arms about him, kiss him as he had always longed to have her kiss him, beg him to forgive her. Twenty-four hours in the old quiet environment, in the old babble of inconsequent prayer-interspersed Spanish, had quieted heart and brain. She was master of her own soul again.

In the old calico apron, she went down beside the sea and watched the steady waves swelling, brimming the pools among the rocks, the little kaleidoscope of silky, coloured sea ribbons, scarlet, hard, slimy sea mosses, plastered tight on the rocks, starfish, anemones, purple spiked sea urchins, pink and bronze baby crabs, all set in an always changing, always marvellous pattern that included every colour in the scale, from the dead china-white of a bit of broken abalone shell to the lustreless inky black of the snail's enamelled armour.

And so the first day died away into a red winter sunset, and the second day, and Billy did not come.

He must have known where she had hidden herself, she mused. She had talked so constantly of the rancho.

What would such a wife as herself do if she had irrevocably hurt her young husband by so selfish and impulsive a performance as this runaway had been? Suppose Billy never forgave her?

She felt bitterly ashamed of herself; her face would burn with hot colour. What a wretched mess she had made of the whole thing! The papers had had a notice of their marriage, and how cruelly a man's pride must be hurt to find himself so treated by the woman to whom he had always been kindness itself, humiliated before his friends, made a laughing stock!

"It's all very well for *you*," Juanita said to herself, as she sat for hours together, motionless, upon the sun-warmed rocks on the shore, "all very well for you to say you'll make it up to him, to say that you *couldn't* do this and that, and that you *had* to have freedom to think, and all that! But it isn't quite so easy to play fast and loose with marriage."

Under the women's forceful hands, abetted, when they shrilly demanded, by those of the two men, the hacienda was restored now to something even more than its old comfort and beauty. Juanita had felt a girl's indifference to housekeeping, a year ago, but now she was older, she was a woman.

Now, she loved to play with it; to clean a great olla and place it effectively where the clear blue shadows fell from the tiled roof across the doorway, where the passion vine grew, and the ground was bright with pungent marigolds, to sweep the patio until the soft old tiles were clear once more, to polish old Spanish brasses and shake old embroideries and tapestries in the delicious spring sunlight.

And as she worked, she thought of Billy. She must give the rest of her life, if need be, to showing him that she appreciated how stupid, how cruel she had been.

On the third day she wrote him, at his mother's house in San Mateo. She told him that she was sorry—sorry—sorry. It had been fatigue and excitement, that sudden flight of hers

she was at the old rancho, hadn't he guessed it? She hadn't thought of anything since she left him except how wrong she had been, of what he had been doing, of where he was. Would he come down to Solito, and let her tell him how bitterly sorry she was? And she was always his Nita.

When Tony had been sent into Solito to mail this letter Juanita felt lighter of heart. She had told the three Doloreses the whole story, and she told them now that "the Señor" might come at any hour. She worked about happily, expecting him. If the letter went up to-night, he would have it to-morrow morning; he would be here in mid-afternoon. Mid-afternoon!

All morning she sang, and when Lolita put her luncheon before her, the Mexican woman ventured a few friendly pleasantries.

"So my mother can sleep in her own cabin to-night, eh, Señorita?"

Juanita turned scarlet, laughed bravely.

"After what I told you all yesterday, I wonder you wouldn't call me Señora, Lolita," she suggested.

"Señora?" The grandmother of forty-four chuckled shrewdly. "God willing, I'll call you that to-morrow," she muttered piously, and left Juanita laughing, yet with an earthquake in her heart.

But when the quiet afternoon hours began, with a soft fog over the sun, and the sea subdued and smothered in milky veils, to her dismay she found the perverse, the inexplicably wilful mood of her honeymoon reviving again. She fought it with every means in her power; but it gained—gained. She couldn't—she wouldn't, become Billy Chatterton's wife. It smothered her—the mere thought, the steadily nearing prospect of his arrival, his eagerness, her explanations carried away on his kisses—dinner-time—and then the dark.

"This," Juanita said aloud, walking along the lonely

cliffs, "this is simple insanity! If you can't tell your own mind for more than five minutes at a time, you belong in an institution! Other women are married, go through the first strange weeks with some dignity—you are making the whole thing difficult and conspicuous and vulgar—yes," she added, quite audibly, if there had been anyone but the looping gulls to hear, "*vulgar!* That's what you are! It'll be lucky for you if a sensible boy like Billy Chatterton ever looks at you again."

But it was all in vain. Her throat thickened, her heart pounded, her brain fell again into the dreamy, bewildered state she so hated, so dreaded. She found herself imagining that in his haste to reach her Billy had driven his car over the cliffs, had been painlessly killed. Painlessly, instantly killed. And her heart soared with wild relief.

Twilight. And he had not come. The Mexican women studied her furtively, but nothing was said.

That was Juanita's first wakeful night at the rancho. She lay staring, sleepless, into the dark, thinking as she had never thought in her whole life before. Her life, unless Billy returned to it, was a broken and a wrecked thing. And the fault was only her own.

The next day she had a letter, addressed to her as Mrs. W. C. Chatterton, Jr. The letter, deeply edged with black, was from Jane Chatterton:

My dear Juanita: You have perhaps read of Mr. Chatterton's sudden death, two days ago. Billy was with his father, at the end, and of course my boy is the only consolation I have in the loss that will alter my entire life. Mr. Chatterton somehow caught a heavy cold and was ill but twenty-four hours. Billy sails to-morrow for the Orient, and will be several months in reaching Paris, where he is to meet me, in May. He wishes you to know that he has forgiven you heartily, that he wholly understands, and that at this time next year you will have no difficulty in establishing your divorce suit on the grounds of desertion. I am meanwhile concerned for your comfort and am having a sum deposited regularly

to your account in the Solito Bank—please do not resent an old friend of dear Maria Espinosa taking this step, and believe that my good wishes are always with you. It is my earnest and confident hope, as I know it must be yours, that my dear boy will find comfort and solace some day in the future, if it is not possible now.

It was signed, "Sincerely your friend, Jane Chatterton," and was written completely in her own beautiful hand.

Juanita sat for a long time motionless, after she had read it; the colour drained from her face, the blood from her heart. It was too hideous to believe.

Deserted and divorced—and nobody to blame for it but her own wicked, stupid self.

"My God, my God," she said aloud, after a while, "what have I done? What have I done?"

Billy, alone with his crushed life and aching heart, already out on the ocean. Herself, a wife who was no wife, a figure ridiculous in the eyes of her own old servants, alone here on the rancho. The future for both of them crossed by a dark stain.

She crushed the letter into her sweater pocket, started blindly on the long walk into town. Now and then, hurrying along as if ghosts pursued her, she took the letter from her pocket, read it again, with flaming cheeks and a sick heart.

She had not left the rancho since the dark night of her arrival, she knew that her presence there was hardly known in Solito. But this afternoon she walked into the village, to buy the San Francisco papers, and send a telegram to Billy.

"Is it too late?" she wrote. She did not even sign it, except with the single letter "J."

"Nita Espinosa!" cried Miss Rogers, kindly and intelligent and eyeglassed, running out of the gift shop. "What's this I hear about your getting married."

Juanita tried to answer, tried to smile, felt the blood in her face and the tears in her throat, and looked down. The

other woman stood bewildered, looking keenly at her, troubled and astonished.

"Your own fault—your own fault!" Juanita told her shamed and miserable heart as she somehow escaped, somehow found herself on the road home again. What would Miss Rogers think of her? What would the stories be that presently would fly through the little town? Fool, fool that she had been to go there!

Yet she must go there sometime. She must face her life sometime, the woman who was married and not married. The Espinosa girl, about whose marriage there had been something queer.

Walking back to the rancho, she stopped at the Mission. The old priest was walking in his garden, walled from the sea, and shady and damp from great fig trees. He welcomed Juanita with tears; he was weak with rheumatism and age; it was good, he said in faltering Spanish, to see the Señora's dear child home again.

Sitting on the old stone bench beside him, she told him the whole story, watching him anxiously while he pursed his dry old mild mouth, and shook his silvery head.

No, no, he said sadly. She was as much married now as if she had been wed for twenty years. She had been deeply to blame, first to take a Sacrament so lightly, secondly to fail in her wifely duty. She was not a child. She knew something of life, of its obligations. We were not supposed, here on this troubled earth, to seek pleasure. We were not supposed to think first of ourselves. The man, she claimed, was a good man, was free to wed. To refuse him what was his right, a good, humble, conscientious wife, was to commit a grave sin.

Smitten, feeling that she hated the dispassionate old man, she returned to the rancho. Whichever way her gaze moved, she seemed to find only thickening difficulties, only fresh evidences of her criminal heedlessness. Padre Aisano had left

her in no doubt. There could be no annulment of this marriage, sanely contracted by two persons of age, and sanctioned by law and church. And for Juanita, at least, there could be no divorce; indeed, he had indicated it to be her duty to draw her young husband back by any means in her power, give her husband his home, his wife, his children, consummate the marriage like a woman of soul and sense, and take up her duties reasonably, with less foolish modern concern as to whether she was happy, whether she was "expressing herself," or not.

Oh, it was frightful! she mused, breathing hard, walking fast as her thoughts overwhelmed her, stopping short when they became utterly unbearable. What could she do? Try to lure back a husband who had rushed away from her—thousands and thousands of miles, the man she had hurt so terribly that even his father's death had not kept him beside his mother when most she needed him?

"I was wrong first," she admitted. "If I hadn't run away, he wouldn't have. But how to get right?"

Well, she must humiliate herself to the dust. She must follow Billy with a letter that would find him in Manila, or Yokohama, or Benares, or Bombay, telling him that he must return, that she loved him. That she would make it all up to him a thousand times over. That if she had been less tired, less confused, less dull after her lonely working year, this never would have happened.

The phrases of her letter ran in her mind, as the placid winter days followed one another. Christmas came, New Year's, and the pumpkins were gathered, and the last dingy leaves drifted down through still, opal air, from the prune trees. The sunlight thinned, lay in a pattern on the yard, through the grape arbour, dried the jewelled frost on the tiles of the patio.

The past softened, drifted away from her. She remembered odd disconnected fragments of old days: Anne Russell,

so contentedly busy in the great, sunshiny, delicately shaded and exquisitely furnished Chatterton mansion. The white Colonial walls, the stretches of the rugs, the flowers mirroring themselves in polished wood, in dim mirrors. The silver and crystal twinkling in the big dim dining room, the voices. Guests arriving for tea, beautiful women slipping bare shoulders and satiny heads free of their evening wraps. Cold, still, forbidding winter dawns, when Kent's feet crunched on the frosty ground beside her, walking home from church.

And then the arrival of the mistress: the scene all violet-scented, all set to laughter and magnetism and the strange forceful charm of that astonishing personality. Juanita trembling in response to it, Kent trembling in response, all her world revolving about Jane Chatterton's beautiful figure, quick hands, quick rich voice.

After these glittering memories, the shadow; the hour when she had flung open Mrs. Chatterton's door. The agony of jealousy, of pain in her heart, and of flight. She seemed to be unable to face trouble, Juanita mused sadly; twice in a short year she had run away from what she dared not endure.

Again she was in Steele & Stern's big loft, working over the boxes of leaflets, the framed inspiring verses, the output of the Stesteco Press. Again Miss Wilson, headachy and complaining and dilatory, and the old second-hand bookshops around the Civic Centre, and Miss Duval's dreary drawing room where the crêpe-clad women murmured and wept. Meals at Muller's Bakery, where the hand-written menu card was fly-spotted and spattered with syrup and soup, the horrible aisles of the Mayfair, with baby-laden women pushing and chattering about the counters: post cards, radio sets, sale on saucepans—sale on peanut brittle—sale on lipsticks——

And escape into Billy's arms, into the luxury of the tea hour at the Fairmont, and the sloped front seat of the car. Or was that once again rather runaway than escape?

She grew graver, walking alone about the rancho, staring at the sea, pondering all these things. She had failed everyone, herself most of all. It was a constant torture to Juanita to look back, to tell herself now how she might have acted, what she might have said. The suddenness, the finality with which she had managed to make wreckage of her whole life, astonished her.

That was the way, was it?—the way unhappy destinies were forged; just a little combination of ignorance and stupidity and unconsidered swift action, and a woman of twenty-five might find herself stranded, forgotten, put aside into this quiet country backwater, with the voyage over and the prizes lost forever.

Obviously, she might not drift along here indefinitely, upon a piece of property to which she had, less than ever, any sort of claim. But it seemed difficult to move. The early summer came in with brilliant, sunshiny days, the dry brown cornstalks were furred with frost in the sweet, leaf-scented mornings, the sun smouldered across the far Pacific, and painted the barns and fences with crimson light, every afternoon, like the light from a fire.

And despite the new gravity, the growing pains that Juanita felt stretching every fibre of soul and mind, there were times when she was happy. It was deep happiness only to be alone, to think, to watch the little drama of the rancho unfolding; the men who came to buy raisins and prunes, pigs and pumpkins; the cows that ruminated contentedly in the corrals, their smooth sides spreading, spreading, with the promise of the autumn.

On that day when Dolores brought forth the new baby in the cabin room that was full of lamp smoke and wood smoke and tobacco smoke, full of men's working garments and jumbled tidies and kerosene lamps and rockers and curtains and plates and holy pictures, Juanita took the delicious, dark-curled older baby into the hacienda with her.

Dark, lumpy, damp, speckled, convulsed with fury was the new baby when Juanita bent over the tangle of heavy comforters and blankets that were smothering his first few vigorous minutes of life. His great-grandmother, old Lola, at sixty-five, was handling him with a terrifying confidence. How dared she stretch the crumpled little saffron legs so boldly, restrain the blindly warlike little arms in one of her big brown hands, laughing at the baby's rage meanwhile!

"Oh, don't hurt him!" breathed Juanita, entitled, by her own shadowy wedlock, to presence here in the stifling, untidy chamber.

"Hurt him! That one!" said his great-grandmother. And she bunched him in her great hands, nude and wailing and forlorn, against her oily dark cheek, for a kiss that was like a bite.

There was a new agony in Juanita's heart, as she went back to await the awakening of the older baby, taking his nap in the centre of what had been the Señora's bed. That hour of terror and bliss, that fighting and wailing armful of helplessness and power, might never come to her now! She might be "the Señora who was really a Señorita," until the end of her life.

The hacienda was all in order; it was four weeks since Billy Chatterton's bride had fled here, away from her wedding night. The old rooms, with their faintly discoloured plaster walls, were floored with the Indian rugs, the dark old Spanish walnut furniture in place; the small-paned windows, on the patio side of the house, had been polished until their thick green glass shone like emeralds. On the garden side, the big shutters were opened to a rush of sweet, shady afternoon air, air rich with the scent of new grass and turned earth, acacia blooms, and the spicy scent of the new eucalyptus tassels that hung like decorations against the mellowed old pink roofs, and the distempered, mild adobe walls.

The eighteen-months-old baby was sprawled luxuriously on

the couch, sound asleep, her empty bottle, flung aside, still filmed with the rich, hot milk of the last meal.

Juanita, once sure that the child really was asleep, had taken a hurried bath, with frequent conscientious glances through a line of opened doors toward the kitchen. Now, freshly dressed, and refreshed after the troubled night, she had brushed her hair to its flyaway golden brightest, and had succumbed into the Señora's comfortable old rocker, with a book.

But she could not read. Even if the light in the shadowy old room, creeping in under the low patio roof, had not been as poor as it was, her thoughts would have been too much confused, too insistent, to free her for reading.

"If I should hear a motor car now," she mused, "an engine coming nearer and nearer, up past the Mission and the Amigos—into our lane—closer and closer——

"And if it should be Billy! Not gone to sea at all——"

CHAPTER XXI

A SOUND, far away but unmistakable, made her heart suddenly stop beating, race, and stop again. She straightened herself on the edge of her chair, one hand pressed to her breast, her head tipped sidewise, her bright eyes intent.

It was a motor car, and it was coming toward the ranch! It was hammering on the bridge, it was floundering in the muddy stretches of the Mission road. Nearer—nearer——

Juanita could feel the blood draining from her face and from her heart. He had come back!

The motor-car engine throbbed steadily nearer and nearer. It stopped, on the garden side of the house, and Juanita could hear a man's quick step on the old flags.

Like a woman in a dream, she went out to the patio, and as the man came quickly in through the wide, arched adobe doorway, he saw her there, slender, hesitating, fearful, the westering sun catching her figure in a blaze of light and turning her flyaway gold hair into a blaze.

But it was not Billy who stood facing her, and who heard her falter Billy's name. It was Kent Ferguson, anxiety, eagerness, doubt, all stamped upon the handsome dark face she knew so well.

"Here you are, then!" he said quickly, under his breath.

He came to her, caught her hands in both his big gloved ones, clung to her, smiling, but so shaken that for a moment he could not find other words.

"I thought I never would get here!" he said.

"Oh, Kent—Kent, I'm in such trouble!" the girl faltered.

clinging to him in turn, with a sudden, exquisite sense that his help would somehow make it all come right. "I've been so lonely—I've mixed things so!"

They turned from the dim low room where the baby slept, that room with all the books of Juanita's girlhood ranged on its walls, with the branch of scarlet-berried shrub she had thrust behind the old Spanish crucifix shining blood-red in the last light, and the arrowheads of the old Indian baskets and the old Navajo rugs, matching the actual arrowheads that hung, with an enormous bow, on the walls, into the sunshine and shade of the patio.

The shadows of the narrow tiled roof were deeply blue, but the sinking sun blazed in fire through the lacy foliage of the pepper trees. Gulls walked in circles on the sunken, irregular flags, and the pungent breath of a brush fire, somewhere on the ranch, scented the clean, mild, salty air.

"Kent," Juanita said, puzzled, "I thought it was Billy. I heard your car!" It was a slip. She must not let him know that she was anxious about Billy; that Billy was not here. "If you knew how glad I am to see you!" Juanita went on hurriedly. "I've got to see somebody—talk to somebody! And *you*—you'll understand.

"We've not seen each other," she went on simply, "since that day we came down here. A whole year ago!"

For a few minutes they stood staring at each other, and Juanita fancied she saw in him a man strangely older, yet strangely younger, too, than the Kent who had come to the rancho little more than a year ago. That man had been bigger, somehow, more loosely built, in subtle ways more careless, more coarse, than this Kent of to-day.

He was thinner, graver, and yet at peace. Even in the first few stiff moments of their conversation she saw that the old restlessness had gone; there was a definite sweetness, a gentleness about him. The dark, quietly smiling eyes seemed to wear habitually now the expression she had loved so much

and seen so rarely; their kind look, their sympathetic look. It was almost, she thought confusedly, as if Kent were sorry for her.

He fixed upon her now the old smile, half serious, reluctant, yet irradiating his whole dark face. But there was a new quality—was it pity?—in his voice.

"Nita, you're prettier than ever!"

She might well be; her whole being was flooded with the hope, the confidence, the joy for which she had been hungering for many troubled days.

They sat down on an old bench in the sunlight and looked at each other as if their eyes would never be satisfied.

"I'm thinner," she offered. Not that what she said mattered much, or seemed to her to matter.

She wore one of her old uniforms, plain black alpaca, decorously rounded about the white throat, decorously long in the sleeves. But lying square and flat on her shoulders was an old baby collar of Spanish embroidery, and at the thin, fine wrist were cuffs of the same fine needlework; her cheeks were flushed, her blue eyes burned like fires under the oddly dark brows, and the bright drift of her hair blurred itself into a halo in the sunlight.

The man, perhaps, was not quite conscious of the details of her beauty; the flush, the glory, the radiance of her had swept them all away. But he was with Juanita again, at the old rancho. Here she was, close beside him, glorious child and girl and woman in one. Her slender hand, her rounded young breasts under the plain gown, her earnestness, eagerness, fragrance, her white-and-gold sweetness were, after all, only the catalogue of charms some other woman might have had.

But this one—whatever she was or was not—this living breathing creature, was the one woman in the world for him.

"Billy's not here," he commented rather than asked. Her

colour flamed suddenly, she fixed suspicious, conscious eyes upon his face.

"No. Not just now." She stopped proudly; no need to explain further. "How did you know *I* was here?" she countered.

"It was guess work, as far as Solito, then I asked at the post office, and sure enough—the woman there said that you had been at home for several weeks! But, then, I knew you were!" Kent said. And again there was a mysterious sorrow, a strange pitying look, in his eyes.

"You knew," Juanita asked, almost at random, and to draw his too personal attention from herself, "you knew that Billy's father had died?"

His astonished gaze answered her. He stared at her for a moment too much surprised to speak.

"Old Chatterton!"

"Oh, yes—very suddenly. A few days after we were married. Billy—Billy was there when he died, it was pneumonia, at the end, but I suppose the accident was the real reason."

"Carwood Chatterton!" Kent ejaculated, still unable quite to grasp it. "Funny thing, I was going to telephone the *Sun*, this morning, too," he added musingly. "Though very likely they wouldn't have mentioned it. I did telephone the San Mateo house," he said hesitatingly. After a moment, with a brief, mirthless laugh she did not understand, "but somebody—the operator, I think—said that the place was closed."

"Poor old Mr. Chatterton," Juanita said, reminded of him again by mention of the house. "He used to be so kind to me! He used to show me engravings, and play cribbage with me, before——" She stopped. "Before Mrs. Chatterton came home," she was about to say. But somehow that memory was always one of pain.

Kent was still stunned with surprise.

"Well, that's a knockout," he murmured, looking at her keenly, as if he sensed something unsaid behind her constrained manner.

"But where on earth could you have been, Kent, not to hear of it?" she asked.

"*Not* on earth, literally," he answered, after a few seconds of frowning silence. "As a matter of fact, I was at sea. I sailed on a fur-trading cruise, three weeks up the coast and back, on the *Madeline Hansen*."

"Is it a big ship? Was it an excursion?" Juanita asked, wrinkling her brows and narrowing her blue eyes in her own little fashion, that fashion he told himself now he had often recalled.

"Four thousand tons, about," he answered laconically, with a flicker of ironic laughter in his eyes.

"Oh. Is that"—Juanita hesitated—"large?" she asked innocently.

"Not very. We had no radio, anyway, which explains my missing the news of poor old Chatterton. No," Kent added, drily, "it wasn't an excursion, although at one time it promised to extend our travels indefinitely—into spheres unknown. We had bad weather, and Captain Larsen, who is a son-in-law of the Hansen interests, broke his leg on the deck. So an entertaining time was had by all."

"It sounds—awful," Juanita commented, puzzled.

"It was." Kent stretched his long legs, in their tweed golf trousers, before him, blinked under the visor of his pulled-down cap. "All in all," he admitted, "it was the most frightful experience of my life."

"But, Kent, why did you go?"

"I don't know," he answered, with the first return she had seen to-day of his old brevity, his old taciturnity. And for a moment they were silent.

"And now what are you going to do, Kent?"

"Now I am going to Baltimore, to see my mother. A

certain publisher has taken my newspaper stories, which are to be brought out under the simple name of *Stet*. 'Stet' means 'let it stand, keep it, don't edit'!"

"Kent—not a *book!*"

"Yep, a book. One of two thousand that will be published next September," he added drily. "But, no, I won't bluff about it," Kent interrupted himself, in a changed tone, "I'm awfully pleased. And I'll be glad to see my mother, and my father, too—they've all acted out the story of the prodigal to the last line, they couldn't do more," he said, his handsome face darkening again, "if I had been a joy and a comfort to them, all these years, instead of the greatest anxiety they ever knew. Well, anyway—that's my plan. Mother and Dad are to make their first visit in twelve years to California next summer, and I am to escort them. So along about July, if you're here, you may expect to see us turn in here—and that reminds me of something else."

He fumbled in his pockets, took out a sheaf of papers.

"The *Madeline Hansen* got into San Francisco last night at nine," he said, "so, naturally, I've not had much time to set things in order. But I find—— Well, to go back—this place was sold last August, wasn't it?"

"How did you know *that?*"

"I'll explain. Do you know who the owner is?"

His tone made her look at him, frowning a little, intense.

"No," she said. "I wrote my cousins—the Señora's cousins in Mexico City, the legatees, you know—their name is Castellago. But I've not heard. They may all be abroad —or in South America. I imagine they're the sort of rich, fat Spanish people who travel a lot, with children and nurses and so on."

"I bought it," he stated simply.

She merely stared at him, her lips rounding incredulously into "*You?*"

"Yes, last winter. After you ran away from Mrs. Chatterton, when I couldn't find you. I bought it then."

"*You!*" she ejaculated again, stupefied. "But what for?"

"Because I didn't want anyone else to buy it," he said. "I knew—or I felt then, never knowing that you would meet Billy—marry Billy, not even knowing that you were in California, I felt that some day you would come flying back here—like a sea gull, Nita—that this was the place you would always find your heart—find yourself——"

She was smiling, but her lips were shaking, her blue eyes brimmed with tears. Her hand gripped his tightly, she looked blindly away, fighting for self-control.

"And so I did!" she whispered.

"This morning, after a succession of baths and shaves and civilized breakfasts," he resumed, "I tried to telephone the Chatterton house, in San Mateo, as I told you. Finally, the operator told me simply that the family was away. It occurred to me to call the *Sun* office, but what I had to say was to *you*, and I had a feeling that you would be here. There was a letter from Mrs. Chatterton for me at the hotel—I'd said she could always send letters there—evidently written just after your marriage. She didn't say anything of old Chatterton's illness. Tell me one thing, Nita," Kent interrupted himself, in a suddenly thickened tone, as, with his hands thrust into his pockets, he stared down at his own shoes, "when did you meet Billy again? How did your engagement come about?"

"I was working, in the Mayfair," she began. Kent looked a quick question. "It's that big red Cash and Carry Store, on Market Street," she explained. She saw him shut his eyes, set his big jaw. "I boarded with some French people, in Franklin Street," Juanita went on. "It was a cold, wintry kind of night, and I met him in Market Street. He

took me to dinner—I looked terrible, because I didn't have very good clothes——"

She thought Kent had interrupted her, but when she paused he merely said, very low, "Go on."

"Well, and then for a few weeks he took me to tea, and driving, and everything," the girl said. "And then I was fired——"

"Fired from the Mayfair?" Kent commented, in an absolutely noncommittal tone.

"Yes. And then Billy was anxious for an immediate marriage and there seemed no reason——" She faltered. Ah, what good reason there had been to say "No," had she but been wise enough to recognize it!

"When did he tell his mother?"

"Immediately afterward. He wrote her a note at the Fairmont."

"Afterward? She didn't know, then, that he had met you again, was seeing you?"

"No, I'm positive she didn't. I didn't"—Juanita hesitated—"I didn't want her to know," she admitted.

"I see." He sat silent, breathing deeply, arms folded now across his chest, and his narrowed gaze staring darkly into space. "Do you happen to know where Mrs. Chatterton is now?" he asked suddenly.

"I don't know. She is going abroad, I know. But perhaps business is keeping her here."

"She's at the Saint Francis. You've not seen her?" he asked, surprised.

She must not—she *must* not continually forget that she was a happy young wife, whose husband was supposedly absent from the rancho only by chance and for a few hours!

"Not—not lately. I forget," she stammered. "When did you last see her, Kent?" She had to ask it.

"Last February. But I telephoned her the day I left in

the *Madeline Hansen*—the day after you were married. I had left the Chattertons, you know. I tried to find you, after that. I was in San Francisco for a while, went down to Los Angeles on a false trail——"

"You were really searching for me!" she exclaimed, trembling a little, smiling.

"Really searching!" He echoed it sardonically, but immediately returned to a quieter tone. "Yes, I suppose I passed you in the street a hundred times," he said. "Somehow I never thought of you as in San Francisco. I came down here, twice, but they hadn't heard."

"But, Kent——" She mused, her beautiful eyes on the distance. "But why?" she began again.

He pursed his lips for whistling, did not move his glance from the dangling bunch of bright red peppers at the kitchen door, across the patio.

"There was something I had to say to you, Nita," he said unemotionally, in a carefully controlled tone. "I can't say it now. Well," he added briskly, "what I came about is this. I've found Sidney Fitzroy."

"Billy told me something of that—that you had, and had lost him again. Tell me!"

"Yes, I found him just after you ran away, last year, lost track of him, and found him last month again, just before I sailed."

"Kent, then how could you sail! Does it mean the *Sun* can buy that property? And does it—does it mean anything to me?"

"Yes, it means exactly the value of that property to you," he answered. "I have an offer for sixty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, less inheritance and accumulated taxes, and so forth."

"But, Kent," she breathed, "enough to buy back the rancho?"

"The rancho, I want you to let me give you, as a wedding

present," he said briefly, with a glance up. "I meant that, from the first!"

It silenced her. She sat, caught by an irresistible current of puzzled and doubtful thought.

"Sidney Fitzroy——" Kent began. Juanita looked up alertly.

"Oh, yes!—tell me about him. You've met him? Where is he?"

"You've seen him," Kent told her, smiling.

Their eyes hung together.

"I've seen him!" she gasped.

"I'll show you his picture, and you'll recognize him," Kent went on, putting his hand in his pocket. Juanita, fascinated, watched him almost without breathing.

But it was not a picture he put into her hand. She looked down confusedly, saw a segment of her own face, caught in a small round pocket mirror.

She turned it over, the back was merely black celluloid; turned it back again, looked from it to Kent, her eyes fearful, her face pale.

"That's it, dear," the man said gently, "don't let it scare you! You're he. You're Sidney Fitzroy, yourself."

CHAPTER XXII

FOR a long minute Juanita sat staring at him, a half-scoffing, half-puzzled expression upon her face, the colour flickering under her clear skin.

"Do you see?" Kent repeated encouragingly. "You're —him. Sidney Fitzroy is your real name. Do you see?"

"See?" Juanita echoed faintly, without a trace of intelligence in face or voice.

"Your name isn't Espinosa at all!" Kent announced.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Kent," Juanita said patiently.

"I'll try to explain it to you, dear. I don't wonder you're confused. It's really horribly complicated. But there was a woman in San Francisco years ago, before the fire, who was an actress. Do you get that?"

"Well—*yes*," Juanita conceded, with an impatient nod, watching him.

"Her stage name was 'Sidney Fitzroy.' And you're her daughter! There, is that simple?"

"I suppose so," the girl answered doubtfully. "It's—it's perfectly horrible not to know your own name!" she added, in a burst of irritation. And for a full moment she was still brooding, with her lower lip caught lightly in her teeth, and her half-closed eyes fixed on space.

"You say her stage name?" she demanded suddenly. "Wouldn't my name be my father's name—didn't she marry him?"

"Let me tell you about that, as far as I understand it," Kent began cheerfully and briskly. "In a few minutes

this'll be over," he said grimly, patiently, to his own soul. "This little actress fell in love with a rich old fellow named Choate, who had an invalid wife and two daughters in Oakland. But she didn't know that.

"It looks as if he just quietly and consistently lied to her," Kent went on, in a silence. "She called herself 'Mrs. Choate,' and they had an apartment in Bush Street. She certainly thought she was married to him, but just why I don't know—just what sort of ceremony there had been—justice of the peace, probably.

"He was in the East when her baby was born, in the Children's Hospital—she must have found out, just at that time, all about him. She wrote him one furious letter and told him that she was having little Sidney Fitzroy christened at the old Mission. And that was the end—she disappeared after that—as if she'd dropped into the Bay!"

"Perhaps she did drop into the Bay?" Juanita, watching him breathlessly, suggested. "But"—she frowned—"but the baby?" she asked, confused. And then, suddenly, with a rush of colour to her pale face. "Oh, but—but *I'm* the baby!"

"You're the baby. Your mother brought you down here to the Señora when you were only a few weeks old. And from that time on you were Juanita Espinosa."

"And she? My—my mother?"

"She went back to her old name, disappeared completely. But old Choate, when he came to die, remembered his child—he thought it was a son, by the way—and it was up to me to find that child."

"I begin to get it," Juanita murmured, in the pause.

"The first clue *I* got," Kent said, resuming the story, "was one day when I was helping old man Chatterton to put some engravings in order, down at the Chatterton house. I found some old songs with 'Sidney Fitzroy' written on them. I went to Mrs. Chatterton—the music was hers, and I knew

she had been on the stage, and asked her about it. She looked me right in the eye, and said, 'I used to know him. But he's dead long ago!' I explained that it was a matter of clearing a title, but she didn't seem interested.

"A week later I went back to the storeroom to have a look at the songs again. But they were gone—every last one of them had vanished!

"It didn't occur to me to put any special significance on that—the old man had had a lot of rubbish burned—natural enough to destroy the old songs, too! I'd forgotten it, al-almost, when we all came down to Pebble Beach, last year, and one morning Jane started off in a car alone.

"Well, just as she started, Justine came to me, all upset, because there had been a telephone message for Madam—Lady Berry was arriving in San Francisco, wanted to get in touch with Mrs. Chatterton.

"One of those things that mean a lot to Jane, you know, to be on the inside track with the next Ambassador's wife. So I jammed on my hat, jumped on to the motor bike I was using, and came flying after her. The rest you know, it became curiouser and curiouser, as Alice says. The minute I got in here to the ranch, I knew I'd broken into something I had no business to know about at all. I met you. And the next day I was glad enough to get away without letting Jane suspect I'd followed her at all!

"I went on thinking about it, and about Sidney Fitzroy, and then, suddenly, one day, a funny thing struck me. It was that all those songs we had seen in the storeroom that day—and there must have been twenty of 'em!—were for a woman's voice. Sidney Fitzroy *might* have been a woman!

"It didn't come to me," Kent added, "for a long, long time. And then it was because I had another idea. Some man on the newspaper one day was talking about the great days of the old Tivoli, and how they had put on the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and 'The Grand Duchess,' and so on,

and I suddenly thought, 'Where have I seen those names before?' This was after you had left the Chattertons, in the days when we were all anxious about you—all trying to find you.

"Well, I went up to the Tivoli—it's a moving-picture house now—and all the old records were burned in the big fire. But they told me about an old singer there named Rose Masson, who lives out on the Panhandle now, and who has all the Tivoli bills, for twenty-two years before the fire. So I went out to see her, and asked her if she had ever heard of a soprano named Sidney Fitzroy.

"She said no, but that she couldn't remember the chorus girls' names. She remembered Gracie Plaisted and Anna Lehrer and Tilly Sallinger, but there had been such streams of chorus girls! However, she let me go over her programmes, and there I found Sidney Fitzroy, in the chorus, under 'Sopranos,' and I knew I was a step nearer. The programmes her name came into were all about 1900—they only appeared there for about seven or eight months. But the point was that the Sidney Fitzroy in old Choate's will certainly wasn't singing in light opera in 1900. Choate was fifty-three when he died, in 1912. That would make him the father of a professional singer at the age of forty-one—which at least didn't seem probable.

"I went back to old directories, old telephone books. No use! And then, one day, remembering what your mother—what the Señora had said about the 'old Mission,' and thinking that it was extremely probable that a chorus girl of 1900 might have lived there, before the day of small downtown apartments, I went over *those* books, out at the old Mission Dolores, in San Francisco. And there I found that Sidney Fitzroy, father dead, mother Sidney Fitzroy, was baptized on the twenty-third of December, 1900. Godmother, Maria Espinosa. The address given was a Shotwell Street address—all burned over, six years later."

"Yes, but then—then!" She had not stirred since he began his story, she was motionless, rapt, now. "But then how did you get *me* into it?"

"Then I went to Mrs. Chatterton," he answered. "It was in the first days after you left her. I told her what I had gotten, and that I would have to put the case in the hands of a detective agency unless she helped me out. She immediately told me the whole thing. She had known Sidney Fitzroy, she admitted it, and she had letters, photographs, to prove it. She and the Señora had been your mother's friends. You were born in a little cottage in Shotwell Street in San Francisco, and when you were three weeks old, the Señora, who had no children, came up to get you. It was she who insisted upon the baptism, giving you your mother's name. Your mother then wrote to Choate, very briefly, I imagine, for she gave him a false impression of your being a boy. But Mrs. Chatterton, who has had occasional reports of you all these years, never knew that Choate had mentioned you in his will until this year."

"And my real mother, Sidney Fitzroy? She died? Did she never go back to singing?"

"Never. She died," he said very gravely. And he was still. "So it only remained, Nita," Kent finished, with his strangely new, strangely gentle smile, "to find you again, take this evidence to the proper authorities, and clear your inheritance. Choate's daughters, both married now and living in the East, have taken steps to have the property merged with the rest of the estate, since the heir is missing, but nothing has been done as yet. So there, dear," he ended, smiling, "is the whole story!"

"You'll have to tell me what to do," she said, after a silence. "If you can manage it, Kent—I'd rather not appear in it, in any way. Couldn't somebody else handle the whole thing?"

"I should think so. Anyway," he said cheerfully, touched

by her subdued manner, "you will have your ranch, Nita, either as a present from me, or one from your husband, or buying it yourself!"

"And I am Juanita Fitzroy," she mused. "Or am I really Sidney?"

"You are Nita, the nicest person in the world to those of us who love you," he said.

"I am nothing!" she answered, in a low bitter tone. "Kent," she added suddenly, "you don't know what a mess I've made of things! I don't seem able to stand on my own feet at all! I'm back at the rancho now, where I started from—but beaten! It's all so mixed—so confused—it seems to me life will never come straight and simple again!"

"Tell me, first," he said, when the passionate voice had died away to silence, "why did you run away from Mrs. Chatterton?"

The girl was silent. She looked across the patio with a hard, set look creeping into her eyes, and making her young mouth stern.

"The day you went away," Kent said, "I had told Jane Chatterton—I can tell you this now, Nita, so much has happened since—it's all such centuries—such centuries ago! I had told Jane Chatterton that at last I loved a woman, that there could never be anyone else in the world for me but you.

"We had been flirting, as most of the idle married women do nowadays," he went on, as Juanita preserved her stony silence. "We had been exchanging those little cryptic sentences, glances—you know the regular game, or perhaps you don't. I admired her, more than that, she had a strange fascination for me—she was a wonderful creature to watch, relentless, tireless, always playing her own game. I had told her of the power she had over me—a sort of charm. So that to hear her voice in the hall, or to watch her, so beautiful, so superb, so daring, was always thrilling to me. "Can you," he broke off to ask, "can you see that at all?"

"Yes, I can see that," Juanita conceded slowly, clearing her throat.

"Well," Kent said, with an air of elucidation. "Then you came along. You came along."

Juanita was silent. But an angle of bright sunshine, falling upon the brick-red curve of an old olla, hung on the wall across the patio, dazzled before her eyes.

For a few moments both man and woman were so still that a young gull, drifting down with stiffly dropped, woodeny pink feet, to the old fountain, walked there like a pigeon, lifted himself, piping, and wheeled up into the clear spacious sunshine again.

"You're like cold water, Juanita," Kent said abruptly. "I want you to know that it was always you—although I didn't know it myself, then. That was the first time I had ever kissed her—and that was to say 'Good-bye.'"

The words took him back to another world, a world of perfumed bodies, hot rooms, rouged women stretching ringed hands for cocktails, cards, money, somebody's latest story.

Here, the windmill creaked suddenly in a wandering breeze, was still, there was a sound of water splashing. The sharp sweet bitterness of chrysanthemums and willow bark drifted lazily through the air. The sun shone warm in the sheltered patio. And in a silence they could hear the sea, crashing, breaking with a smother of water, quiet, and then crashing again.

"Those winter mornings, walking home with you——" Kent began. He got to his feet, his voice ended abruptly. The first blue lines of shadow were inching their way down the old discoloured, whitewashed wall.

He went through the narrow gate in the wall, stooping his tall head under the curved arch. Juanita followed him into the bright blaze of sunset light beyond. The sky filled all the world, except for a narrow bar of ocean at their feet.

They hung upon a lichened fence, staring northeast, their backs to the sun and the sea. Across the low shoulders of the brown, shabby hills, cows made their indifferent way. To the left, down the coast, the pink roof of San Esteban and its square bell tower were flooded with red light; the fig trees of the Mission stood towering like blots of dark shade above the adobe wall.

Between them and the Mission, and the village four miles beyond, ran the brown Amigos, in flood, with green willows bowed over the old bridge. On the brown hills oaks clustered; behind them, on the hills, stretched long lines of shade. The air was sweet and pungent, clean, vital. A cock crowed somewhere, clear and high, and hens pecked and chuckled in the barnyard.

"You feel," said Juanita, "that the lid has been lifted off the world."

"Jane told me, in her letter," Kent admitted suddenly and awkwardly, "that Billy has sailed for China."

Juanita's eyes flew to his face. She turned a little pale.

"I did not know that you knew," she said, with a fearful, an apprehensive frown darkening her blue eyes.

"The notice of your marriage was in the paper, you see," the man elucidated gently, carefully, as if he were speaking to a child. "I saw it—I was right there, in San Francisco. I was at the Hotel Saint Francis."

"Right there!" she echoed, and was suddenly still. She was leaning her full weight on her elbows, caught over the upper bar of the fence. Her face was cupped in her hands. To speak, she had glanced suddenly at Kent. Now she resumed her faraway gaze at the distant hills again.

"We might have met him, any one of those days," she thought, "if we had gone to the Saint Francis instead of the Fairmont."

Too late now, and a foolish thought to entertain even for a moment! Kent might have come up to them, during one of

those leisurely tea hours, everything might have been changed.

"The instant I heard of your marriage," Kent was saying —she brought her eyes resolutely to his face—"I telephoned Mrs. Chatterton," he said.

"Because of this Fitzroy business?" she asked.

"Partly," Kent answered, with a little hesitation. "I had been hunting for you for months," he reminded her.

"But then you left on this sea trip?" she said, widening her eyes.

"Yes, immediately after I had talked to Jane."

"But why?" persisted Juanita. "Was it a consignment—did you go after a newspaper story?"

"No," he answered, again with an air of hesitation, of doubt. "No, it was absolutely on the impulse of the moment. I was walking on the water front, fell into conversation with the men who were putting the boat in shape, waited for the skipper, and sailed with the afternoon tide. If it had been for three years instead of three weeks, I think I would have gone just the same," Kent added, with a gravely significant and sympathetic look for her. "You see—I knew."

Juanita, entirely missing his meaning, could only stare at him blankly.

"Knew?" she repeated, puzzled.

"I knew—why Billy has gone away," he admitted, watching her anxiously and closely.

"But—but he hadn't gone then!" Juanita exclaimed, in utter confusion. "His father wasn't dead, then! How could you possibly know anything about it, if you telephoned Mrs. Chatterton the day after we were married!"

Kent's look in answer was as strangely bewildered as her own. He was silent. She saw the brick-red colour creep under the firm, hard lines of his jaw and cheeks.

"I blame myself for it entirely," Juanita began, "I see

now how wrong I was. And there is only one thing for me to do—wait for him, and make it all up to him, if I can!"

"You mean that no steps have been taken to annul the marriage?" Kent asked directly.

The blood rushed to her face.

"There can be no divorce, no annulment of our marriage," she answered. "It was a valid marriage, by both church and state. Let her write me what she likes—Mrs. Chatterton, I mean!" Juanita added, warming. "This is an affair that touches only Billy and me. I treated him badly—I'm sorry. I ran away from him, the night after we were married—I suppose her letter told you that? And Billy was angry—of course, I don't blame him—and has gone away. That's—that's all there is to it."

"You ran away from Billy?" Kent asked slowly, after a pause.

"Certainly!" Juanita admitted impatiently.

"When was this?" He was still utterly at sea.

"Didn't she tell you, in her letter?" demanded the girl. "You said she had written to you, that a letter was waiting when you got to the Saint Francis last night."

"She said nothing of your leaving Billy in that letter," Kent muttered. He turned abruptly, walking toward the cliff, and Juanita walked beside him.

"And nothing of Mr. Chatterton's illness?"

"Nothing. She simply said that she had gotten in touch with Billy, and that the marriage would be annulled, and that he would sail immediately for China."

"But why *should* he sail for China!" Juanita exclaimed, turning white. "They're furious, aren't they?" she murmured, under her breath. "And it's all my fault!

"But, you see, I really have no choice in the matter, Kent," she presently added, in a logical tone. "For better or worse, we're married. Nothing can undo that, for me. My life now is to wait for Billy, and if Billy never comes back——"

Something in his manner interrupted her; a sudden flinging up of his head, a choking sound, as if he found the matter insufferable. She looked at him ruefully, in surprise.

"It's a life sentence for me," she told him more mildly, with the hint of her whimsical smile.

"Yes. Well!" Kent answered, abruptly turning. "Suppose we go back? I see—I see your point."

Juanita paused to give him a keen, oblique look, as she picked her way beside him through the littered mud of the yard, pausing at one of the cabins.

"I've got to take a peek at the babies," she said. "I asked Lola to scramble us up some sort of a meal, but goodness knows when we'll get it. Everything is upside down to-day. Kent," she added urgently, suddenly catching at his arm, raising her distressed eyes to his face, "there's something I don't understand. What is it? You're holding something back from me—I know you are! What is it?"

He put his hands gently on her shoulders, looked into her eyes.

"I think there is, dear. And of course I'll tell you all I know—clear it up all I can. I think there's one important—one terrible thing that you don't know. I supposed, of course, that you did. But I promise you—I promise you, Juanita, that I'll clear it up for you before I go away. I have to wait—and see about something."

"Something terrible!" she repeated, whitening.

"No, no, no, not as bad as that!" he said, smiling with infinite tenderness and pity. "Run in and see the babies! I'll walk about and smoke. I'll come when you call me."

It was almost an hour later when he heard her voice and went in to find food, hot, smoking, peasant food, ready on the table. Juanita, doing the honours, talked only of the babies while Dolores was in the room. But he knew that she was only waiting,—that she hardly knew what she said.

"I seem to have an absolute gift for complicating my own

life, Kent," she began, when the hearty, simple meal was over and they were lingering with the apples and the hard Spanish cheese. "I believe most girls have to get married before they ever give the serious side of it a minute's thought."

Glancing at the doorway that Lola had finally closed behind her, Kent asked:

"Will you do something for me, Juanita? Will you tell me exactly what happened between yourself and Billy? Why he left you?"

She had fixed her eyes upon him with the first word. Now she looked at the teacup she held, set it down, and rested her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands. Her eyes were far away.

"He did not leave me," she began simply; "I left him."

"Was this before his mother got in touch with him?"

"How do you mean before his mother got in touch with him?" the girl demanded, surprised and a little affronted. "This was the day after we were married."

"He left you—*then?*" Kent demanded.

"No, I left him."

There was a silence, during which Kent stared at her steadily, his lip bitten, his breath coming a little hard.

"You left *him?*"

"At—we had been at Pebble Beach, and we were wandering about Monterey. That night we had meant to get down as far as Santa Maria, anyway, but it was late afternoon then. A man had brought the car over from Pebble Beach, with our suitcases, and we were in the car, and Billy said that if we didn't want to go any farther, we could stay at Del Monte and go on to Santa Maria the next day."

"Well?" asked Kent.

"Well. It was just then, something upset me—I felt as if I were going to die—nerves, I suppose. I said—I couldn't. I went all to pieces."

She stopped, pondered a moment, the memory of that old emotion shaking her again.

"So you see I was the one to blame, Kent. That was the beginning. Billy was wonderful," Juanita resumed. "He was as kind as he could be—understood everything—it wasn't that. It was just that, after having agreed to it, after having made all the arrangements, I simply couldn't go through with it."

"Did Billy make any fuss—fight you on it?" Kent asked.

"He had no chance. I got on the train. I wrote him afterward, but he never answered. It was just at the time of his father's death—poor Billy," Juanita said, "and his mother answered for him."

"Then did she come down?"

Juanita glanced at him wide-eyed, shook her fly-away gold head.

"Oh, no. I've not seen either, since."

"H'm!" Kent ejaculated, shrugging his shoulders slightly.

They sat silent, the man frowning as he smoked, the girl glancing at him now and then as if his preoccupation a little puzzled and surprised her. Shadows deepened in the room, the last glints of day shone mellow on the old plaster window sills and the deep arch of the patio door, and were gone.

"You see," Juanita said, raising hopeful eyebrows studying his darkly set face, "I don't understand!"

"No, you don't understand," Kent answered briefly.

"But what is it I don't understand, Kent?" she demanded patiently.

He looked up at her, the wistful, flowerlike little face under its bright aureole, the frowning, beautifully pencilled dark brows, the half-cross, half-hurt, all-childish expression of the young mouth.

"Ah, Nita!—you're so sweet," Kent said suddenly, with a break in his voice. And he leaned across the table to put his big, firm fingers for an instant over the beautiful little slim

hand that lay among the scattered dishes. "You don't know, do you, dear, why Billy sailed," he said, grave again.

"Ah, but I do!" Juanita answered anxiously, the scarlet rushing into her cheeks once more. "I do! That's—that's just the trouble. You—and his mother—*don't*. But I do."

Kent, lighting another cigarette, watched her steadily.

"All right," he said. "Why did he go?"

"Because he was angry at me," Juanita answered bravely.

A look of astonishment came into Kent's face; she saw that her explanation had been entirely unexpected.

"Didn't he leave you because his father was ill?"

"Certainly not! He didn't know his father was ill! I would have gone with him, I was married to him!" Juanita answered, almost indignantly.

"He got a message from his mother, then—at Pebble Beach?"

"No, he didn't. He"—Juanita recalled it, frowning a little, in her effort to straighten it all out—"he sent *her* one, from the hotel, just after we were married. But he didn't have any message from her. I remember his speaking of it!"

"But, then," Kent demanded flatly, in a silence, "why did you think he left you—sailed for China?"

She countered, in the same blankly surprised tone:

"Why does his mother—why do *you*—think he did?"

"We *know* why he did," Kent said gravely.

Juanita looked a little frightened.

"You mean that—that there was some reason I don't know?" she asked. "Oh, Kent," she cried, suddenly putting her elbows on the table, and burying her face in her hands. "If I could think so—if it were only something except my own blind stupidity and cruelty! But he didn't tell his mother, then," Juanita added suddenly, looking up with wet lashes, "he evidently didn't tell his mother that it was my fault—that I'd been unkind to him. That, in fact," she

added, in an undertone, as if half to herself, "that, in fact, it was *I* who ran away, not he."

"You!" Kent exclaimed loudly.

"Yes. I—I stepped on the train at Del Monte, the day after we were married—I gave him the slip, like a—like some sort of horrible common woman," Juanita exclaimed, with hot cheeks.

"You'd—but *why?* You'd quarrelled?" Kent asked, amazed.

"Not exactly—no. But I'd quarrelled with myself," Juanita explained quickly. "All the time we were engaged—ever since the very beginning of our friendship, in fact, I'd known that it wasn't right—that I didn't feel about him what a girl ought to feel.

"But, you see," she went on, troubled, appealing for his sympathy with a sudden, full look of her glorious shadowy eyes, "you see I have no mother, Kent. *I* didn't know! I thought maybe it was just because he did want to kiss me that I—didn't like it, that I would have been the same with any man!"

Kent cleared his throat.

"I see. Go on!" he said briefly.

"Well, that was it," Juanita continued anxiously. "I was working hard at the shop, tired out, wondering all the while if I really loved Billy—if I really had the right to marry him. And then, suddenly, we did get married, and I—I felt it was all wrong, somehow, and ran away! He's furious at me, of course—any man would be."

"Let me think for a few minutes," Kent said, glancing at his watch.

"Think!" she exclaimed, in a little burst, half of laughter and half of tears. "I don't believe we will ever get it all straightened out, no matter *how* much we think!"

"Juanita," Kent said suddenly, out of a profound silence.

"I want you to do something awfully hard, for me. I'll be right here, I'll stick to you, I'll see you through," he added reassuringly, as her eyes widened with alarm. "But I want you to see Mrs. Chatterton!"

"Oh, I couldn't. She's wild at me!" Juanita said promptly, turning a little pale.

"No, she's not wild at you at all." Kent said, as if the point were not important. He paused, apparently uncertain.

"Besides," Juanita pursued uneasily, "she wants me to get a divorce because of the marriage not being a real marriage! But that's out of the question—old Father Aisano said so!"

"Annulment," Kent said, in his quiet, meditative tone, again as if he did not quite know how to proceed.

Suddenly Juanita seemed to collapse, as if all at once she felt the cumulative effect of the long weeks of strain, the suspense of this strange day, and the persisting mystery. Tears, miserable and fatigued, brimmed her eyes; she put her folded arms down on the table, and buried her face in them, and cried.

"It won't be long now," Kent said, after a moment, in which he had taken a restless turn about the room. And again he looked at his watch.

Lola came in with a lamp, carried dishes away, and, after a moment, giving the intruder more than one murderous glance as she did so, Juanita raised her head, dried her eyes, and, with a little visible effort, regained her self-control.

Smiling courageously across at Kent, in the mellow golden circle of the light, she found him looking at her oddly.

"Juanita—just one more thing. Why did you speak of the marriage as not a real marriage?"

Her cheeks flamed.

"Because that was the *trouble*——" she began, and stopped.

"What trouble?"

"That was why I ran away! That's why Billy is so furious! That's why he sailed for China!" Juanita explained, in an impatient burst. "What else? I was tired, and excited, and worried—I just didn't want to be married—I thought it was all a mistake!"

"Just a minute," Kent said, in a strange voice, as her angry accents died away. "I have to get this. This was the day after you were married?"

A silence.

"I treated him very badly," Juanita said then, in a small voice.

"But you said—I understood you to say—you must let me understand this, Nita." Kent's voice was trembling. "Do you mean that you were never, in fact, his wife?"

Her cheeks were burning. She had framed them in her hands, rested her elbows on the table. Now she looked across at him and nodded, without words.

"You mean that, Nita?"

"Oh, Kent—Kent!" the girl cried, almost in a wail. "What else is all this fuss about?"

Again there was a silence, and then Kent said in a stupefied voice:

"My God, if this is true!"

"Why, but that's the *trouble!*" Juanita explained, in her sweet, troubled young voice. "I don't—I'm not proud of myself," she added, after a moment. "I was nervous—I simply wanted to get away by myself, think things over! Billy was wonderful about it, he couldn't have been kinder or sweeter or more generous—it was all my fault."

"Juanita dear," Kent said, "you can't know how important this is. You've got to forgive me. I can't—I don't get——"

He sank into a low chair, near the airtight stove, and buried his head in his hands. She could hear his deep breathing.

"It's true!" she persisted, a little frightened.

Kent looked up, with a changed expression on his face. An expression haggard, exhausted, yet infinitely relieved and at peace, too.

"Then, Juanita," he said, "our troubles are over! My God, what a break! My God, what a break! Now, my darling," Kent urged her feverishly, coming over to the big chair she had taken opposite his own, and kneeling down beside her, to take possession of both her hands. "Now, my darling, you've got to keep a stiff upper lip for just a little while longer—I'll be right here beside you—and you have my word for it that everything is coming out *all right.* You've just got to get through this one more thing—hark!"

He broke off, listening. Juanita, with fear and amazement in her face, listened, too. Through the soft early spring blackness outside they could hear the regular throb of a motor engine, far away.

"That's Jane," Kent said, glancing at his wrist. "Five-thirty o'clock—punctual to the minute. I didn't tell you before, I didn't want to make you nervous. But she's—here!"

"Oh, Kent, I can't!" Juanita whispered, clinging to him, terrified. "I'm afraid of her."

"You needn't be," he said soothingly. "She's come down to tell you something, Nita. I telephoned her this morning—I didn't tell you that. She's at the same hotel, as it happens, but I didn't see her. I told her I was coming down to find you, and that if you were here I would wire her from the hotel at Solito, and so I did. But she didn't tell me about poor old Chatterton. We only talked for a few minutes; perhaps she thought I knew!

"She's going to tell you something you should have known long ago, dear. And then she'll go away, and you'll never see her again unless you want to.

"And one of the things she'll tell you is that Billy has

always loved you, loves you now, and that some day, when he comes back to California, he's going to come and see you again. He was never angry at *you*, Nita. Indeed, your holding him off, your instinct that something was wrong, makes all this miserable business a hundred—a million!—times easier for us all. It broke his heart to go away."

Her beautiful eyes were misty with compassion and bewilderment.

"Poor Billy!" she said vaguely, still clinging to Kent, still watching his face.

"Poor Billy! Can you imagine, Nita, that on top of your leaving him, and his father's death, he had news that shattered his love and his pride in the one person who was left to him?"

"Not his mother!" Juanita whispered sharply.

"Yes, poor boy. And poor Jane! I can imagine what it cost her to tell him," Kent mused. "I told her this morning that she must tell you, too," he added, with a sudden grimness in his face. "She might have overlooked that. But I can forgive even Jane now," he said, "now when I know that something instinctive—something far wiser than you knew, saved you in time!"

"You mean I *shouldn't* have been his wife?" Juanita whispered.

"I mean you *couldn't* be, dear. Juanita, do you think he told his mother that?"

"That I ran away? I think so, Kent. Wouldn't that be Billy's reason for sailing?"

"No, that wasn't his reason. *If* he told her," Kent said, his mouth ugly, his narrowed eyes fixed on space, "*if* he told her and she let you go on worrying and wondering, and wrote you of a divorce, then—then she ought to be hanged, Nita."

There was time for no more. The motor car had circled the hacienda, had stopped outside the patio door. There

was darkness in the room now, except for the lamp, but outside the twilight lingered gray and endless beside the sea, and the moon had risen. The woman who approached the door could find her way. They could hear her quick step, coming nearer—coming nearer——

CHAPTER XXIII

SILHOUETTED against the spring darkness outside, and the pearly young moonlight that was washing the patio's distempered, mild old walls, with the shadowy plumes of the tall trees behind her, and the yellow lamplight full in her beautiful and imperious face, was Jane Chatterton.

She came in splendidly, loosening heavy furs as she came. Her quick look went from Juanita to Kent, she gave the man her gloved hand and quite simply embraced the girl. Her rich coat, her gloves, her bag, she quickly placed upon the old couch, removing her black-veiled small hat, and adding it to them, and loosening the hair at her temples with that gesture of the tensed fingers that Juanita remembered clearly.

"You sent for me, Kent," she said, with a glance. The wonderful voice, with its pride and positiveness, its fruity cadences, its music, set a hundred bells ringing painfully in Juanita's heart.

As she spoke, Jane seated herself in the winged armchair that had been the Señora's, and Kent, tall, stooping, looking at her unsmiling from under his slightly knitted brows, stood at the mantelpiece, where the little stove had succumbed into a dull purring. Juanita, trembling, sat down in a low basket chair, with her hands clasped in her lap, her body bent forward, her eyes never leaving the older woman's face.

Jane settled the exquisite transparent cuffs that edged her long, full, crêpe-banded sleeves. Her collar was high,

also banded with crêpe, a fold of white organdy finishing it, set off the clear brunette colour of her skin. Her beautiful chestnut hair was slightly crushed by the heavy bonnet, but Juanita thought she had never seen her so brilliantly, so regally beautiful. She looked, the girl thought confusedly, like an empress, like some mourning queen, magnificent even in sorrow.

"I didn't write you—I didn't know, Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita began timidly, indicating the black gown, "but I was sorry!"

Jane looked at her, smiling bravely. But instantly the brown eyes brimmed with bright tears, and she whisked from her cuff a wisp of handkerchief and touched them lightly.

"I telephoned Mrs. Chatterton this morning," Kent said, "asking her to come down and talk to you, Nita. I was lucky enough to get her at the Saint Francis."

"And I came down on the express, at one o'clock," Jane finished composedly "and got a man to motor me from Monterey."

"Mrs. Chatterton," Juanita faltered bravely, "I am terribly, terribly sorry about Billy!"

Jane looked at her thoughtfully. But she had glanced first, and shrewdly, at Kent.

"I know how it must seem to you," Juanita went on. "It must have seemed the silliest piece of—of high-school girl stupidness—I can't understand it myself, even now. But"—she spoke quickly to prevent a rush of tears—"but I am sorry," she added simply. "If he will come back, I'll do my best to make him forget it. I'll do anything—all my life long——"

She stopped, choked, and sat staring blindly before her, with the stove and the familiar rug blurring and rocketing through tears.

"I wrote you," Jane reminded her, in a low voice, and not unkindly, "that since you felt your marriage to him a mis-

take, you could manage a divorce, quite quietly, in the fall?"

"Mrs. Chatterton, there never can be anything but a legal freedom for me," Juanita said firmly, looking up and looking down again. "I will be his wife to the end of my life! But it isn't that. It's that I am sorry—I want to try, after all, to make him happy—to give him the sort of devotion, of—of love, that he wanted from me!"

"That, Jane, you see, is the attitude I suspected! I tried to indicate that to you this morning when I telephoned," Kent, who had been looking keenly from one woman to the other, said quietly.

Jane, biting her lip a little, looked brightly, speculatively at him, and for a long moment there was silence.

"What is your objection to a divorce, Juanita?" she asked, after a while. "They are everyday occurrences, nowadays. Billy and I intend never again to live in California—the little flurry of his secret wedding, followed by a divorce, may be a few days' wonder, nothing more. The San Mateo house, by the way," she ended, with her old elegant air of negligence, "was sold yesterday. I am almost through with what I must do here. I shall be in Washington for a while—you heard of the death of my dear, dear friend there, Senator Babcock's wife, Kent?" she asked.

A vision of her apartment at the Capitol, her mourning, her car, her quiet dinners, her sympathetic exchange of confidences with the wealthy and imposing widower, the man whose diplomatic career, it was conceded, might be a brilliant one, was like the sudden laughter of some mischievous god in the background of Kent's mind, as he said:

"There is no such thing as divorce for Juanita, Jane. She feels that her only course is to become reconciled to Billy, to try to patch up the misunderstanding. Otherwise, there is no freedom for her, no life for her, again."

Jane slightly pursed her lips, sent her thoughtful look from one face to another.

"Do you understand," Kent asked steadily, "that their marriage was not—in the true sense, a marriage? That, under given conditions, there might be an annulment?"

"Yes, so Billy told me," Jane assented, shrugging.

"You knew that," Kent said mildly. And he pursed his lips and looked away.

Jane, as if impressed by his tone, glanced at him for a moment, evidently pondering, with a wrinkled forehead and a bitten lip.

"Certainly I knew it," she admitted, after a pause. "But does it not occur to you that a divorce—they are common enough nowadays!—causes considerably less public interest than an annulment?"

Kent moved his mild, his speculative gaze to her face, and Juanita was surprised to see the other woman restless under his look, to see the uncomfortable colour come into her cheeks, as she looked up and said, with a hint of defiance in her voice:

"In any case, my dear Kent, isn't this, perhaps, an affair to be handled by the family?"

"No," Kent answered unhesitatingly, "I don't believe it is."

"You don't feel that the peculiar circumstances of an annulment might be regrettable?" she persisted, glancing at him, and then at the fire, with all her old air of indifference, of having the situation in hand.

"Regrettable to whom?" he demanded flatly. "You would have let the situation rest there, let Juanita imagine herself the one to blame, you would have let the matter go through as just one of a thousand divorces?" he added, beginning to grow warm.

Jane Chatterton appeared to muse upon this unhurriedly, her head dropped a little to one side.

"Truly, until you telephoned actually to threaten me this morning, to say that you would give the whole thing to the

newspapers, it seemed to me the simplest way," she submitted innocently.

"Then Billy," the man asked, "doesn't know the truth?"

"Oh, yes," she corrected him, nodding, "Billy knows. I had to tell him, naturally."

"And he didn't prefer simply to cancel the whole thing?" Kent asked.

"I don't think," she answered, with an air of consideration, but she had turned white, "that he expressed himself. He got away—the whole thing almost killed him! Divorce or annulment—is there so great a difference between them, my friend?"

"You must understand my position," Juanita, who had been listening to them in growing agitation, broke in at this point. "I appreciate your interest, Kent, and I appreciate the anger and disappointment that Mrs. Chatterton must feel! I've made a most frightful mess of everything. But you must understand that there can't be any divorce, and there *can't* be any annulment, for me. Billy and I knew what we were doing—we were of age——"

"Hush, my dear!" Jane said authoritatively. And for a moment they were all silent.

Then the older woman spoke, in the most simple manner and the softest voice she had used to-day.

"I see your point, Kent," she conceded. "I see what you want me to do. Probably you are right!"

But even after this she paused, so long that Juanita, whose eyes were fixed on her face, had time to steal a look at Kent. He too was watching Jane, steadily, sombrely. Jane had half closed her eyes, her mouth was firmly shut, she lightly beat upon the rug with her shining slipper.

"Well, I am not going to make a second act of this, Kent," she presently said suddenly, with a sort of amused, desperate valour. "Juanita will understand that my silence was to spare her a shock, as well"—she smiled—"as well as society,"

she added. "My dear child," she said to Juanita, "come here!"

She indicated, at her knee, the old hassock, upon which Juanita had sat at the Señora's knee through many and many a winter evening. The girl, seating herself there, found her heart beating wildly, found her hands gathered in the other woman's fine, white unringed hands.

"It is only this," Jane began. "This, that I would have told you months ago if you had not run away from us all. Your marriage to Billy was no marriage, Juanita, for the best of reasons. By a merciful chance you were saved from it.

"It has to do with your own history," she added, as Juanita, ashen white, merely stared at her in utter incomprehension. "I was married, twenty-six years ago, Juanita—before I ever met Carwood Chatterton. I had a child by that marriage before I was eighteen years old. Now, do you understand?"

No. Juanita could not understand. The walls, the table with the old lamp upon it, were moving slowly up and down. Black blots swam before her eyes, like the blots that used to come on her soap bubbles, years ago. She felt a horrible sensation of nausea, another even more wretched one of slipping—slipping——

It was ridiculous to topple in this gentle, spineless way, straight into the rushing gray waters of some river—the Amigos—closing about her——

Afterward, Lola was there, inexplicably indignant, and Lolita, crying. She was propped against some firm, heartening substance—Kent's shoulder, Kent's arm——

The lamp was still burning peacefully, sending its mild disc of light upon the table, in the old room. Kent lowered her into pillows, touching her cheek with his lightly, as if they were two friendly ponies. The Mexican women went out.

Juanita put her hand up to her head, felt it wet, her temples

had been splashed with water. She was glad to close her aching eyes again.

When she opened them, it had all come back. She knew why Kent was there—about what they had been talking. She glanced about, raising her head a little, Mrs. Chatterton was standing at one of the low, deep-set, many-paned windows, staring out into the garden that was dimly visible in the moonlight. The lamp, reflected there, seemed glowing among the bare rose bushes and the evergreens.

Juanita sat up, pushing back the damp hair from her temples and looking oddly young, forlorn, and childlike as she whispered to Kent:

"Kent, is that true? That Billy is my brother?"

"Your half-brother," Kent answered cheerfully, watching her. "That's all there is to it—no more mystery than that!"

She put her feet to the floor, sat with her face buried in her hands for a few seconds, and then got to her feet.

"Well, it's too bad," she said simply, in a heartbroken voice. She took her old chair by the fire and sat looking aimlessly at the pattern of the rug at her feet, her whole attitude so eloquent of weariness, bewilderment, and despair that Kent's look, meeting that of Mrs. Chatterton, held in it a sudden terror.

"She'll be all right!" Mrs. Chatterton assured him, in a low tone, as she in turn resumed her seat again. "But you see," she added with a little malice, "the truth is not quite as humane as you thought it might be, Kent. This is a terrible shock for her, of course."

Juanita did not stir. Drooping, her tired eyes narrowed, and staring dully before her, she apparently did not hear the other woman's voice.

"Did you know this, Kent?" the girl presently asked heavily.

"No. But I suspected it."

"You didn't——" The girl raised her sombre look, lowered it again—"You didn't warn me, or warn him!" she observed lifelessly.

"I couldn't find you," he said.

"You could have told *him*."

"That—for his mother's sake—I didn't do," Kent confessed. "It was wrong. But, moving heaven and earth as I was to find you, unsuccessfully, it never occurred to me that *he* might find you, just by chance."

"No, perhaps not," she agreed mildly. And for a moment nothing more was said.

"On the day the announcement of your wedding was in the paper," Jane contributed suddenly, "Kent telephoned me. He asked me if I had taken any steps to locate you and Billy. As a matter of fact, I was not even awake when the message came. It caused a good deal of excitement, naturally—the telephone was ringing all morning long. Billy's father was much less distressed than I would have feared, fortunately, for he was far from well. I telephoned all the big hotels, even Del Monte, telegraphed Santa Barbara and Beverly Hills and Los Angeles, and the Overland Limited going east. At three o'clock I got Pebble Beach Lodge, and they said that you had been there, that you were going to Del Monte or Santa Maria that night and they could follow you with a message. That," she added, sweeping her superb glance toward Kent, "was what I told you when you telephoned, do you remember?"

"Two hours before I sailed," he answered with a nod.

"As a matter of fact," Jane continued, "you were at neither place, and I was still keeping the wires busy in every direction when Billy came in, into the house in San Mateo, looking haggard—half crazy—at eight o'clock.

"He told me the truth. That, by some strange instinct, or by chance, Juanita had escaped him. He was frantic—having no clue as to where she might be.

"Mr. Chatterton was taken ill only a few hours later, and Billy was with him, at the end. The next morning——"

She paused. Juanita glanced at her and saw that the proud, beautiful mouth was trembling, the dark eyes suffused with tears.

"The next morning I told Billy everything," Jane Chatterton continued composedly, after a moment, "and the morning after his father's funeral he sailed for China. Our few close friends I have told that the marriage was a mistake and is to be ended by a quiet divorce. And I still feel," she added, with a glance at Kent, "that that is the more reasonable way to handle it."

"It never occurred to you," Kent asked, in a silence, "that a divorce would end Juanita's life, as far as marriage was concerned? That she had been feeling herself responsible, very much to blame, disgraced by all this?"

Jane considered his face with large, thoughtful eyes, slightly pursed her lips, slightly wrinkled her brow.

"No, I confess that that didn't occur to me," she admitted, a little struck by the fact. "Perhaps you are right. My own idea was to settle it as quietly, as simply and quickly, as possible."

"There are things," Kent assured her sternly, "that cannot be handled in that way."

"Are there?" she asked, raising her eyebrows indifferently. "I've never met them. This must still be handled carefully, for Juanita's sake," she reminded him. "It isn't only self-protection that influences me now, Kent. My boy knows, and my husband is dead.

"I want you to understand," she added slowly, looking at the girl, "that I'm not merely trying to protect myself!"

"I can't"—Juanita said, looking up, and drowned in a sudden rush of bitter tears—"I can't believe any of it!"

"Perhaps not," Jane Chatterton said. She was silent, staring at the isinglass doorway of the stove, as if the ruby

square of fiery light half mesmerized her. "I was very young," she added, in a low, steady voice. "The coming of a child to me was unspeakable calamity—it ended, or I thought it ended, all my hopes for my own life. But there was never any dislike for you," she went on, glancing at the girl. "Every time I thought of you it was with a sort of ache—an agony of pity. I came down here, to this house, to see you, when you were about a year—perhaps two years, old, when you were toddling around the garden, and Maria's adoration of you and your love for her—ah, well, I cried all the way home in the train," Jane said, smiling, and touching her eyes with the wisp of handkerchief again, "and I saw then that it wasn't wise—that I must forget you, let you grow to safe and happy womanhood here, without me.

"My family," she resumed, as there was utter silence in the room, "was of the humblest type. My home was a hovel, my brother a felon. Drink, quarrels, dirt, debt—that was my beginning. I got a job in a millinery store, when I was sixteen, and a year later was offered a chance in the Tivoli chorus.

"For five months I sang there, as 'Sidney Fitzroy.' My own name I hated—Jenny Davis. I hated everything connected with my beginnings, naturally. We were playing 'The Geisha' when I met Fred Choate. For the first time in my life I saw what I might win to, with beauty and ambition and determination—I tasted champagne, I wore orchids, white gloves, a great soft coat with a fur collar.

"I was seventeen and he was forty-five, a widower, with two little girls away in boarding school.

"He had an apartment in Bush Street—magnificent, it seemed to me. We were to be married, it was all gaiety, parties, flowers, late hours—intoxicating, at seventeen. It seemed to me I was daring, challenging life, courageous. One night there was a mock marriage, a friend of his in a clergyman's dress, a license, congratulations, champagne—

all this in his rooms. I think I knew it wasn't real—it's a long time ago. It's twenty-six years since I was seventeen, Juanita. He drove me frantic, laughing at me one day, quite seriously assuring me, on another, that his friend *was* qualified to marry us, that I was his wife. Sometimes I went out to the Mission, to the whining and drinking that was my home—sometimes with a woman I had met quite by chance, a delicate dark New England woman, Señora Espinosa, who was having medical treatment in the city, who had a tiny apartment there. Sometimes, after a while—it was neither——

"Well, I won't deceive you!" Jane interrupted herself scornfully. "I knew all the time. Any girl knows. But I think that perhaps I thought the mockery would push us, somehow, into the real thing, into real marriage. You can never know what the restaurants meant to me, the lights and music and excitement, his gloved hands, paying bills.

"Then he quite simply stopped it, one Sunday morning when he was driving me in the Park. Never mind that."

She frowned, biting her lip, staring at the floor.

"I had felt myself entrenched," she said. "But I had no claim at all. I went on singing for a few months. Then I went back to the millinery store. I dropped the name of Sidney Fitzroy forever. I walked the streets, ate, went home, talked—my God, what a nightmare of days!

"And then, one day, I met Maria Espinosa—angel, angel of divine goodness that she was to me. She took me to her apartment—I cried myself ill.

"Literally ill," added Jane, her voice grave, quietly sustained, and her manner indicating nothing but a sort of dreamy, long-ago interest. "You were born that night, too soon. You were delicate, Maria took you to her heart and was your mother. What story she told her husband, I don't know—I never saw him. He was much, much older than she. He died not many years later.

"And before you were three weeks old I was back in my old

job," she said. "My name gone, my dreams gone, you but a hazy troubled memory, and the problem of my father and my mother, my brother, my bread and butter, my place in the world, all that I knew.

"What I have paid for it," Jane added, rising, her voice shaken with bitterness, "the fears, the shame, no woman but a woman like myself has ever known! I've lived—over a pit. I've sat at my own table, jewelled, laughing, envied by the other women, knowing that some mischance might tear the ground from under me, plunge me down into the abyss again.

"I've looked at Billy," she added, "confident, arrogant, aristocratic, perfectly sure of his mother, and I've known that the hour might come—as the hour did come—when he must despise me. Thank God," she said passionately, her vibrant yet steadily controlled voice trembling in the silent, lamp-lighted room, "thank God, my husband never knew, he trusted me, he loved me to the end! And to my boy," she ended, "I said, when the time came, 'Billy—it is because of me that you are a gentleman, rich, free to live where you please, one of the envied of the world! You speak languages, you drive your cars, your boats, you play tennis and golf and polo—because of me! I might have married the manager of the Valencia Street livery stable—you couldn't have helped yourself. I've done something for you every hour of your life. Now you do something for me!'"

Her own fire had brought the tears into her eyes, and half scornfully and half angrily she shook them away.

"About Nita's interest in the Mission Street property, Kent," she said, as she wiped her eyes, pinned on the beautiful mourning bonnet, and shook the long veil free, "that will have to lapse to the daughters, according to the Court's decision, lacking the discovery of the heir. But my check to this child here," she said, drawing the thick soft folds of her fur coat about her and nodding toward Juanita, "will more than

cover that. It is Billy's wish as well as mine that she shall be well cared for. As to the annulment of the marriage, see old Judge Todhunter. He is an old, old friend of mine; for all our sakes, he'll manage it without a whisper getting about." She hesitated, looking unsmilingly from one to the other.

"Nita," she said then quietly, opening her arms, "come here and kiss me, dear. You and I may not meet again for a long time."

But even when the girl's bright head was resting against her breast, she did not break.

"Believe that I never meant to harm you—even now, I think you will have a happier life than your mother has had!" she said, kissing the fly-away gold hair. "Be happy, dear, and forgive me when you can! You'll never know the fight that such a girl as I has to make, nor what one is willing to sacrifice to win it!"

"You mustn't say 'forgive you,'" Juanita stammered, clinging to her, in tears. "It isn't—that. It's just that I'm so—sorry!"

Tears filmed the dark eyes that were smiling now into her blue ones, and Jane smiled through them as she said:

"Write to me, now and then. Don't—judge me by a heart as pure, as good, as yours is! Kent," she added, in a lighter tone, "will you see if that man is there waiting? I told him to come back in an hour. I'm going all the way back to Del Monte to-night." She freed Juanita, went to the doorway which Kent held open. The eye of a motor car shone red in the garden. "Kent," Jane said, pausing, "you'll take care of her? You'll help her?"

"To the end of my life," he answered gravely.

Still she detained him, her hand, white-gloved, laid lightly on his arm, her glowing face framed in the rich soft sables.

"I loved you, Kent," she said steadily, in her clear, half-scornful voice, "and I had never loved any man in my life before. I would have given everything—everything for

which my life has been a long fight, for you. So that I am a loser, after all!

"Good-bye!" she added, on a note of ironic laughter. The taxi driver met her; Juanita, standing by the lamp, her heart turned to pity and pain, heard the imperious tones speaking of rugs, of closed windows.

A cold sweet rush of night air came in from the garden. And Kent came back and closed the door.

So passed Jane Chatterton, leaving the faint acid rich odour of furs in the room, the clean sweetness of violets, of perfumes and powders.

Leaving a profound silence. The man and woman who stood there, motionless, could hear the chug-chug of the motor car, the grinding of gears. The sound died away toward Solito, hammered again on the bridge, and was gone. The windmill creaked in the dark barnyard outside, and again there came to their ears the punctual crash and retreat, crash and retreat of the sea.

Juanita sank into her chair; only her beautiful hands, laid limply on the chair arms, were lighted by the lamp's little circle, her head was flung back wearily, her thick, upcurled lashes lowered on her pale cheeks. In the gloom her hair shimmered like a pool of molten sunshine.

Kent sat down on the hassock at her knee, and held one hand over hers. The whiteness of her young throat rose from the old embroidery of her collar like a flower. Her breast moved with deep even breathing, with an occasional sharp sigh.

There was an interruption. One of the Mexican women put her head into the room, addressed the girl in Spanish. Juanita answered her quickly; the door closed, and there was silence again.

"Kent," she whispered, after a while, "you'll stay to-night——"

"At the Saint Stephen, in Solito," he supplied.

"You'll be here to-morrow?"

"All the to-morrows. As long as you need me."

She reversed their hands, so that hers lay on top of his, and he felt the tight clinging touch of her fingers.

"Lola says supper is ready," the girl whispered indifferently after a silence, "but I'm not hungry. Are you?"

"Ravenous," he answered promptly. And he saw the shadow of a smile tug at her mouth.

"She asked," Juanita added, without opening her eyes or changing her position, "if I were sure you were not 'the Señor.'"

"I hope," Kent answered gently, as she fell silent again, "I hope—that I *am!*"

Juanita did not answer. Two tears broke from her long lashes and ran down her cheeks. He saw her lip quiver, and the effort she made successfully to steady it, felt her fingers tighten. For a long while they sat so, without moving.

"Kent," she whispered, "isn't it good to think of it—just the quiet old rancho, and the trees, and the miles of orchard and pasture, with the oaks and the creek—and always the sea, so peaceful—so friendly—out there in the dark."

"Home," he said, touched, speaking a little thickly, rubbing her hand slowly with his big finger.

And the gallant, blown little sea gull safely there again, he thought. Dolores asleep with her baby in her arms, in the stifling lair of the cabin, the cattle in the big barns, the horses bedded down, even the dogs curled in some warm heap of old sacks, and Lola and Lolita once again in the red furnace glow of the kitchen, pounding corn and frying onions.

The moon shining down upon the empty shore, the empty fields, the churned mud and tipsy fences, the mellowed lines of barns and sheds, the granary where split sacks were leaking meal, the dairy odorous of faintly sweet, faintly sour wet wood. Shining upon the gracious, shabby old hacienda, with its whitewashed, moon-washed patio, where the black shad-

ows of the grapevines and the peppers fell like Spanish lace on the broken tiling.

"Give me five minutes," the girl asked, opening her beautiful eyes suddenly and looking straight into his, "five minutes to wash my face and brush my hair, and we will have dinner."

"Take all the time you want," Kent said, his heart singing with a sort of awed joy. "We have all our lives, Juanita."

THE END

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